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THE BEAUTIFUL WRETCH

THE FOUR MACNICOLS

THE PUPIL OF AURELIUS

THE

BEAUTIFUL WRETCH

THE FOUR MACNICOLS

THE PUPIL OF AURELIUS

Three Stories, in Three Volumes

BY

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CHAPTER XXIII.

AT LAST.

He found Frank King in the little room in Cleveland Row, alone, sitting before the fire, a shut book on the small table beside him.

'I've got bad news for you, King,' he said, bluntly. 'I wish it hadn't been my sister. But you know what women are. It's better to have nothing at all to do with them.'

'But what is it?' Frank King said, with some alarm on his face.

'Madge has bolted.'

'Madge has bolted?' the other repeated, staring at Mr. Tom in a bewildered sort of way.

'Yes. Gone and married that fellow Hanbury. This morning. I'm very sorry I have to come to you with a story like that about my own sister.'

Mr. Tom was very much surprised to find his friend jump up from the chair and seize him by the arm.

'Do you know this, Beresford,' he said, in great excitement, 'you have taken a millstone from my neck. I have been sitting wondering whether I shouldn't cut my throat at once, or make off for Australia——'

'Oh, come, I say!' interposed Mr. Tom, with a quick flush.

'Oh, you needn't think I have anything to say against your sister,' exclaimed his

friend—on whose face there was a sudden and quite radiant gladness. 'You don't understand it at all, Beresford. It will take some explanation. But I assure you you could not have brought me pleasanter news; and yet I have not a word to say against your sister. I know that is a privilege you reserve for yourself; and quite right too.'

It was manifestly clear that Captain King was not shamming satisfaction: not for many a day had his face looked so bright.

'Well, I'm glad you take it that way,' said Mr. Tom. 'I thought you would be cut up. Most fellows are; though they pretend not to be. I really do believe you're rather glad that Madge has given you the slip.'

'Sit down, Beresford, and I will tell you

all about it. I proposed to your sister Anne years ago.'

'To Nan? Why wasn't I told?'

'These things are not generally preached from the house-tops. She refused me point-blank; and I knew she was a girl who knew her own mind. Then I rejoined my ship; and remained mostly abroad for a long time. I fancied it would all blow over; but it didn't; I was harder hit than I thought; and then, you know, sailors are driven to think of bygone things. Well, you remember when I came home—when I met you in the street. I thought I should like to have just another glimpse of Nan—of Miss Anne, I mean—before she married the parson. Do you remember my going into the drawing-room? Madge was there—the perfect image of Nan! Indeed, I thought at first

she was Nan herself. And wasn't it natural I should imagine the two sisters must be alike in disposition too? And then, as it was hopeless about Nan, I fancied—I imagined—well, the truth is, I made a most confounded mistake, Beresford; and the only thing I have been thinking of, day and night, of late, was what was the proper and manly thing to do—whether to tell Madge frankly—or whether to say nothing, with the hope that after marriage it would all come right. And now you needn't wonder at my being precious glad she has herself settled the affair; and there is not a human being in the world more heartily wishes her lifelong happiness than I do. And I wish to goodness I knew some way of letting her know that too.'

Tom stretched out his legs—his hands

were in his pockets—and said, contemplatively,—

'So you thought Madge was the same as Nan. I could have told you different, if you had asked me. You thought you could find another girl like Nan. If you want to try, you'll have to step out. By the time you've found her, the Wandering Jew 'll be a fool compared to you. Girls like Nan don't grow on every blackberry bush.'

'I know that,' said Frank King, with a sigh.

Then Mr. Tom looked at his watch.

'I'm very hungry,' said he. 'Have you dined ?'

'No, I have not. I was going to walk along to the club when you came in.'

'Come with me to the Waterloo. You see, something must be done about these

two ninnies. He must get something to do; and set to work. The Baby has never been accustomed to live up a tree. She must have a proper house.'

Frank King got his coat and hat; and they both went out. He was thinking of his own affairs mostly—and of this singular sense of relief that seemed to permeate him; Mr. Tom, on the other hand, was discussing the various aspects of the elopement, more particularly with regard to the Court of Chancery. During dinner the two friends arrived at the conclusion that people generally would look upon the affair as a harmless, or even humorous, escapade; and that the Court, seeing that the thing was done, would allow the young people to go their way, with a suitable admonition.

This was not quite what happened, how-

ever. To begin with, there was a clamour of contention and advice among guardians and friends; there were anonymous appeals to the runaways in agony-columns; there were futile attempts made to pacify the Court of Chancery. All the Beresfords came up to town, except Nan, who remained to look after the Brighton house. The chief difficulty of the moment was to discover the whereabouts of Mr. John Hanbury. That gentleman was coy; and wanted to find out something of what was likely to happen to him if he emerged from his hiding-place. At last it was conveyed to him that he was only making matters worse; then he wrote from certain furnished apartments in a house on the south-west side of Regent's Park; finally, there was a series of business interviews, and it was arranged that on a particular day he

should attend the Court and hear the decision of the Vice-Chancellor.

On that fateful morning, poor Madge, her pretty eyes all bedimmed with tears, and her lips tremulous, was with her sisters and mother in the rooms in Bruton Street; the gentlemen only attended the Court. Jack Hanbury was looking exceedingly nervous and pale. And indeed, when the case came on, and the Vice-Chancellor began to make certain observations, even Mr. Tom, whose care for the future of his sister had now quite overcome all his scorn for that fellow Hanbury, grew somewhat alarmed. The Court did not all appear inclined to take the free-and-easy view of the matter that had been anticipated. The Vice-Chancellor's sentences, one after the other, seemed to become more and more severe, as he described the gross

conduct and contempt of which this young man had been guilty. He deplored the condition of the law in England, which allowed persons to get married on the strength of false statements. He wound up his lecture, which had a conciseness and pertinence about it not often found in lectures, by the brief announcement that he should forthwith make an order committing Mr. John Hanbury to Holloway prison.

There was an ominous silence for a brief second or so. Then the Court was addressed by Mr. Rupert—who was Mary Beresford's husband, and a fairly well-known Q.C.—who made a very humble and touching little appeal. He said he represented the relatives of the young lady; he was himself a near relative; and they were all inclined to beg his Lordship to take a merciful view of the case. They

did not think the young man, though he had acted most improperly, was inspired by mercenary motives. He was now in Court; and was anxious to make the most profound apology. If his Lordship——

But at this moment his Lordship, by the slightest of gestures, seemed to intimate that Mr. Rupert was only wasting time; and the end of it was that Mr. Jack Hanbury, after having heard a little more lecturing on the heinousness of his conduct, found himself under the charge of the tipstaff of the Court, with Holloway prison as his destination. It was not to be considered as a humorous escapade after all.

'Madge will have a fit,' said Mr. Tom, when they were outside again. 'Some one must go and tell her. I shan't.'

'I knew he must be committed,' said Mr. Rupert to the young man's father. 'There was no help for that; his contempt of Court was too heinous. Now the proper thing to do is to let him have a little dose of prison—the authority of the Court must be vindicated, naturally; and then we must have a definite scheme for the establishment of the young man in business before we beg the Court to reconsider the matter. I mean, you must name a sum; and it must be ready. And then there must be an understanding that Miss Beresford—I mean Mrs. Hanbury's—small fortune shall be settled on herself.'

'My advice,' remarked Mr. Tom, 'is that Madge should go herself and see the Vice-Chancellor. She might do the pathetic business—a wife and not a widow, or whatever the poetry of the thing is. I

think it's deuced hard lines to lock up a fellow for merely humbugging an old parson up in Kentish Town. Why shouldn't people get married when they want to? Fancy having to live three weeks in Kentish Town! I wouldn't live three weeks in Kentish Town to marry a Duchess.'

'I am afraid,' said Mr. Rupert, drily, 'that the Vice-Chancellor is too familiar with the sight of pretty damsels in distress. I think, Mr. Hanbury, if you can produce a deed of partnership with your friends in Southampton, that would be more likely to influence the Court. On our side we agree. And of course there must be a humble apology from the young man himself. We had better wait a week, or a fortnight, and then renew the application. I will go myself and tell the young lady what has happened.'

Madge did not go into a fit at all; but what she did do was to decline positively to remain in Bruton Street. No; back she would go to the rooms that her dear Jack had taken for her. They might come to see her there if they liked; but that was her home; it was her place as a wife to remain in the home that her husband had chosen for her. Madge did not cry as much as had been expected; she was angry and indignant, and she said hard things about the condition of the law in England; and she had a vague belief that her brother Tom was a renegade and traitor and coward because he did not challenge the Vice-Chancellor to a duel on Calais sands.

Nevertheless, in her enforced widowhood, Madge found time to write the inclosed letter—nay, she went first of all to the trouble of walking down Baker Street

until she came to a shop where she could get very pretty and nicely scented note-paper for the purpose :—

'DEAR FRANK—Tom brought me yesterday your very manly and generous letter, and I must write and thank you for your kind wishes for my happiness. It's dreadful to think that persons should be shut up in prison, when everybody is agreed it is needless—merely to satisfy a form. You are very kind in what you say; you were always kind to me—kinder than I deserved. But I didn't think you would mind very much my running away; for I am sure you care far more for Nan than you ever cared for me; and now Edith declares that Nan has been in love with you all the time. I hear you have been doing everything in your power towards getting poor Jack out of prison; and so I thought I

would do you a good turn also. You might take this letter to Nan, and ask her if every word in it isn't true—unless you think you've had enough of our family already. Dear Frank, I am so glad you forgive me; and when I get out of my present deep distress I hope you will come and see us and be like old friends. —Yours sincerely, MADGE HANBURY.'

At this present moment Captain King, as they still call him (for all these things happened not so long ago), considers this letter the most valuable he ever received. Not any message from home announcing to the schoolboy that a hamper would speedily arrive; not any communication from the Admiralty after he had arrived at man's estate; nay, not any one of Nan's numerous love-letters—witty, and tender, and clever, as these were—had for him

anything like the gigantic importance of this letter. It is needless to say that, very shortly after the receipt of it, and without saying a word to anybody, he slipped down to Brighton, and got a room at the Norfolk.

It was so strange to think that Nan was a little way along there; and that there was still a chance that that same Nan—the wonder of the world with whose going away from him the world had got quite altered somehow—might still be his! It bewildered him as yet. To think of Nan at Kingscourt!—her presence filling the house with sunlight; charming everybody with her quiet, humorous ways, and her self-possession, and her sweetness, and the faithfulness of her frank, clear eyes! And all his thinking came back to the one point. This was now Nan herself he had

a chance of winning; not any imaginary Nan; not any substitute; not any vision to be wavering this way and that; but the very Nan herself. And if it was true—if the real Nan, after all, was to go hand-in-hand through life with him—where, of all the places in the world, should they first go to together? To that far-away inn at Splügen, surely! Now it would be his own Nan who would sit at the small table, and laugh with her shining, clear eyes. She would walk with him up the steep Pass; the sunlight on her pink cheeks; he would hear the chirp of her boots on the wet snow.

Amid all this wild whirl of hope and doubt and delightful assurance, it was hard to have to wait for an opportunity of speaking to Nan alone. He would not go to the house, lest there should be

visitors, or some one staying there; he would rather catch Nan on one of her pilgrimages in the country or along the downs, with solitude and silence to aid him in his prayer. But that chance seemed far off. He watched for Nan incessantly; and his sharp sailor's eyes followed her keenly, while he kept at a considerable distance. But Nan seemed to be very busy at this time. Again and again he was tempted to speak to her as she came out of this or that shop, or when he saw her carrying an armful of toys into some small back street. But he was afraid. There was so much to win; so much to lose. He guessed that sooner or later the vagrant blood in Nan would drive her to seek the solitariness of the high cliffs over the sea.

It turned out differently, however. One squally and stormy morning he saw her

leave the house, her ulster buttoned up, her hat well down over her brows. He let her pass the hotel, and slipped out afterwards. By and by she turned up into the town, and finally entered a stationer's shop, where there was a public library. No doubt she had merely come to order some books, he said to himself, downheartedly, and would go straight back again.

However, on coming out, he noticed her glance up at the driven sky, where the clouds were breaking here and there. Then she went down East Street towards the sea. Then she passed the Aquarium by the lower road. This he could not understand at all, as she generally kept to the cliffs.

He soon discovered her intention. There was a heavy sea rolling in ; and she

had always had a great delight in watching the big waves come swinging past the head of the Chain Pier. That, indeed, turned out to be her destination. When he had seen the slight, girlish-looking figure well away out there, he also went on the Pier, and followed.

It is needless to say that there was not a human being out there at the end. Tags and rags of flying clouds were sending showers of rain spinning across; between them great bursts of sunlight flooded the sea; and the vast green masses of water shone as they broke on the wooden piles and thundered on below. When he reached the head of the Pier, he found that Nan, who fancied herself entirely alone, was resting her two elbows on the bar, and so holding on her hat, as she looked down on the mighty volumes of

water that broke and rushed roaring below.

He touched her on the shoulder; she jumped up with a start, and turned, growing a little pale as she confronted him. He, also, had an apprehensive look in his eyes—perhaps it was that that frightened her.

'Nothing has happened to Madge?' she said, quickly.

'No. But come over there to the shelter. I wish to show you a letter she has written.'

A few steps brought them to a sudden silence; it was like stepping from the outer air into a diving-bell.

'Nan, I want you to read this letter, and tell me if it is true.'

He gave it her; she read it; then slowly, very slowly, the one hand holding

the letter dropped, and she stood there silent, her eyes downcast.

'Nan, I have loved you since the very first night I ever saw you. I tried to make believe that Madge was you; Madge herself has saved us from what might have happened through that desperate mistake. And you, Nan—you are free now—there is no one in the way—is it true what Edith says?'

'It isn't quite true,' said Nan, in a very low voice; and her fingers were making sad work with Madge's letter. 'I mean—if she means—what you can say—since the very first night that we met. But I think at least—it is true—since'—and here Nan looked up at him with her faithful eyes, and in them there was something that was neither laughing nor crying, but was strangely near to both—'since—since ever we parted at Como!'

CHAPTER XXIV.

'BRING HOME THE BRIDE SO FAIR!'

'POOR Jack!' that was all Madge's cry. She did not care what arrangement was being got up by the parents and guardians interested. She did not want her fortune settled on herself. To her it did not matter whether the brewery was in Southampton or in Jerusalem. All her piteous appeal was that her dear Jack should be got out of prison; and the opinion that she had formed of the gross tyranny, and cruelty, and obstinacy of English law was of a character that dare not be set forth here.

'What is the use of it?' she would say. 'What good can it do except to keep people miserable?'

'My dear child,' the sighing and sorely-troubled mother would answer, 'the Vice-Chancellor has admitted that it can do no good. But the authority of the Court must be vindicated——'

'It is nothing but a mean and contemptible revenge!' exclaimed Madge.

However, Mr. Tom took a much more cool and business-like view of the matter.

'When he is let out,' he remarked, 'I hope the Vice-Chancellor will make the other side pay the costs of all these applications and proceedings. I don't see why we should pay, simply because Jack Hanbury went and made an ass of himself.'

'I beg you to remember that you are

speaking of my husband!' said Madge, with a sudden fierceness.

'Oh, well, but didn't he?' Mr. Tom said. 'What was the use of bolting like that, when he knew he must be laid by the heels? Why didn't he go to his father and uncle to begin with, and get them to make this arrangement they have now, and then have gone to the chief clerk and showed him that there was no objection anywhere——'

'It was because you were all against him,' said poor Madge, beginning to cry. 'Everybody—everybody. And now he may be shut up there for a whole year—or two years——'

'Oh, but he isn't so badly off,' said Mr. Tom, soothingly. 'You can see they treat him very well. By Jingo, if it was the treadmill, now—that would exercise

his toes for him. I tried it once in York Castle; and I can tell you when you find this thing pawing at you over your head it's like an elephant having a game with you. Never mind, Madge. Don't cry. Look here; I'll bet you five sovereigns to one that they let him out on the next application — that's for Thursday. Are you on?'

'Do you mean it?' she said, looking up

'I do.'

It was wonderful how quickly the light came into her face.

'Then there is a chance?' she said. 'I can't believe the others; for they are only trying to comfort me. But if you would bet on it, Tom—then there's really a chance.'

'Bet's off. You should have snapped at it, Madge. Never mind, you'll have your dear Jack: that'll do instead.'

That afternoon Mary Beresford, now Mrs. Rupert, called, and Mr. Tom, with much dignity of manner, came into the room holding an open letter in his hand,

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'and friends assembled, I have a piece of news for you. Mr. Francis Holford King, late Commander in Her Majesty's Navy, has just contracted a—what d'ye call it?—kind of engagement with Miss Anne Beresford of that ilk. It strikes me this is what is termed consolation-stakes——'

'There you are quite wrong,' said Madge, promptly, and cheerfully. 'He meant to make me the consolation-stakes; for it was Nan that he wanted to marry all the way through.'

'Well, I shall be glad to see you all married,' said Tom. 'I've had enough bother with you.'

'You look quite worn out,' his eldest sister remarked.

'At least,' he said, sitting down in an easy-chair and stretching out his legs, 'at least I have gained some wisdom. I see the puzzlement you girls are in who haven't got to earn your own living. You don't know what on earth to do with yourselves. You read Ruskin, and think you should be earnest; but you don't know what to be earnest about. Then you take to improving your mind; and cram your head full of earth-currents, and equinoxes, and eclipses of the moon. But what does it all come to? You can't do anything with it. Even if you could come and tell me that a lime-burner in Jupiter has thrown his wig into the fire, and so altered the spectrum, what's that to me? Then you have a go at philanthropy—that's

more practical; Sunday-school teaching, mending children's clothes, doing for other people what they ought to do for themselves, and generally cultivating pauperism. Then, lo and behold! in the middle of all this there comes by a good-looking young fellow; and phew! all your grand ideas are off like smoke; and it's all "Dear Jack!" and "Dear Alfred!" and "I'll go to the ends of the earth with my sodger laddie!" Oh, I know what life is. I see you girls begin with all your fine ideas, and reading up, and earnestness——'

'I suppose, then, there is no such thing as the formation of character,' said his eldest sister, calmly.

'The formation of character!' exclaimed Mr. Tom. 'Out of books? Why, the only one among you who has any character worth mentioning is Nan. Do you think

she got it out of books? No, she didn't. She got it—she got it——'

Here Mr. Tom paused for a second; but only to make a wilder dash.

'——out of the sunlight! There's a grand poetical idea for you. Nan has been more in the open than any of you; and the sunlight has filled her brain, and her mind, and her disposition altogether——'

'I presume that also accounts for the redness of her hair?' said Mrs. Rupert.

Tom rose to his feet. There was an air of resignation on his face as he left the room. He said, half to himself,

'Well, Nature was right in making me a man. I couldn't have mustered up half enough spite to make a passable woman.'

Now, the end of the Madge and Jack episode was in this wise. On the second

application the Vice-Chancellor flatly refused to release the young man from prison. His gross offence had not yet been purged. It was quite true, his Lordship admitted, that the young lady and the guardians and relatives on both sides were also sharing in this punishment; and it was unfortunate. Moreover, arrangements had now been made which seemed to render the marriage a perfectly eligible one, if only it had been properly brought about. Nevertheless the Court could not overlook the young man's conduct; in prison he was; and in prison he must remain.

More tears on the part of Madge. More advice from Mr. Tom that she should go and plead with the Vice-Chancellor herself; he was sure her pretty, weeping eyes would soften the flintiest

heart. Correspondence addressed by Captain Frank King to Admiral Sir George Stratherne, K.C.B., containing suggestions not in consonance with the lofty integrity of British courts of law.

Then, at last, the Vice-Chancellor relented. Mr. Hanbury had given an undertaking to execute any settlement the Court might think fit with regard to the young lady's property. Then he must pay all costs of the proceedings, likewise the guardians' costs. This being so, his Lordship was disposed to take a merciful view of the case; and would make an order discharging the young man from prison.

'Oh, Jack,' poor Madge exclaimed, when he was restored to her, 'shall I ever forget what you have suffered for my sake?'

Jack looked rather foolish among all these people; but at last he plucked up courage, and went and made a straightforward apology to Lady Beresford; and said he hoped this piece of folly would soon be forgotten; and that Madge would be happy after all. The sisters were disposed to pet him. Tom tolerated him a little. Then there was a general bustle; for they were all (including Frank King) going down again to Brighton; and they made a large party.

How clear the air and the sunlight were after the close atmosphere of London! The shining sea—the fresh breeze blowing in—the busy brightness and cheerfulness of the King's Road—it all seemed new and delightful again! And of course amidst the general clamour and commotion of getting into the house, who was to take

much notice of Nan, or watch her self-conscious shyness, or regard the manner in which she received Frank King after his absence? You see, Nan was always wanted to do things, or fetch things, or send for things. 'She's a house-keeperish kind of young party,' Tom used to say of her, when he had coolly sent her to look out his shooting-boots.

The spring-time was come; not only was the sunshine clearer, and the wind from the sea softer and fresher, but human nature, also, grew conscious of vague anticipations and an indefinable delight. Flowers from the sheltered valleys behind the downs began to appear in the streets. The year was opening; soon the colours of the summer would be shining over the land.

'Nan-nie,' said Frank King to her who was on most occasions now his only and

dear companion, as they were walking along one of the country ways, 'don't you think June is a good month to get married in?'

'Frank dear,' she said, 'I haven't had much experience.'

'Now, look here, Nan,' he said—the others were a long way ahead, and he could scold her as he liked. 'You may have some strong points—wisdom, perhaps—and a capacity for extracting money out of people for lifeboats—and a knack of boxing the ears of small boys whom you find shying stones at sparrows—I say you may have your strong points; but flippancy isn't one of them. And this is a very serious matter.'

'I know it is,' said Nan, demurely. 'And far more serious than you imagine. For, do you know, Frank, that the moment

I get married I shall cease to be responsible for the direction of my own life altogether. You alone will be responsible. Whatever you say I should do, I will do; what you say I must think, or believe, or try for, that will be my guide. Don't you know that I have been trying all my life to get rid of the responsibility of deciding for myself? I nearly ended—like such a lot of people!—in "going over to the Church." Oh, Frank,' she said, 'I think if it hadn't been for you I should have married a clergyman, and been good.'

She laughed a little, soft, low laugh; and continued:

'No, I think that never could have happened. But I should have done something—gone into one of those visiting sisterhoods, or got trained as a nurse—you don't know what a good hospital nurse

you spoiled in me. However, now that is not my business. Undine got a soul when she married; I give up mine. I shall efface myself. It's you who have to tell me what to think, and believe, and try to do.'

'Very well,' said he. 'I shall begin by advising you to give up cultivating the acquaintance of tinkers and gypsies; and first of all to resolve not to speak again to Singing Sal.'

'Oh, but that's foolish—that is unnecessary!' she said, with a stare; and he burst out laughing.

'Here we are at the outset!' he said. But don't you think, Nan-nie, you might let things go on as they are? You haven't done so badly after all. Do you know that people don't altogether detest you? Some of them would even say that you made the

world a little brighter and pleasanter for those around you; and that is always something.'

'But it's so little,' said Nan. 'And—and I had thought of—of I don't know what, I believe—in that Cathedral at Lucerne—and now I am going to do just like everybody else. It's rather sneaky.'

'What is?' he asked. 'To be a good woman?'

'Oh, you are not philosophical,' she said. 'And me—me too. My brain, what there was of it, is clean gone; my heart has got complete mastery. It is really ludicrous that my highest ambition, and my highest delight, should be to be able to say "I love you," and to go on saying it any number of times. But then, dear Frank, when all this nonsense is over between us, then we will set to work and try and do

some good. There must be something for us to do in the world.'

'Oh yes, no doubt,' he said, 'and do you know when I think this nonsense will be over between you and me, Nan?—when you and I are lying dead together in Kingscourt churchyard.'

She touched his hand with her hand—for a moment.

'And perhaps not even then, Frank.'

Well, it was a double wedding, after all; and Mr. Roberts was determined that it should be memorable in Brighton, if music, and flowers, and public charities would serve. Then Mr. and Mrs. Jack Hanbury were to come along from Southampton; and Mr. Jacomb had, in the most frank and manly fashion, himself asked permis-

sion to assist at the marriage ceremony. There were, of course, many presents; two of which were especially grateful to Nan. The first was a dragon-fly in rubies and diamonds, the box enclosing which was wrapped round by a sheet of note-paper really belonging to her Majesty, and hailing from Whitehall. These were the words scrawled on the sheet of paper:—

'*This is for the wedding of the* BEAUTIFUL WRETCH, *who has now completed the list of her atrocities by jilting her oldest sweetheart.—G. S.*'

The second present that was particularly prized by Nan carries us on to the wedding-day. It was one of the clearest of clear June days; a fresh southerly wind tempering the heat; there was scarcely a cloud in the blue. How these rumours get about it is impossible to say; but a good

many people seemed to have discovered that there was to be a double wedding; and there was an unusual crowd about the entrance to the church and along both sides of the roofed portico. Among these people was one who attracted a little mild polite curiosity. She was a country-looking, fresh-complexioned young woman, who was smartly dressed and trim as to ribbons and such things; and she held in her hand a basket of fairly good size and of fancy wicker-work. And this basket, those nearest her could see, held nothing else than a mass of wild roses, all with the thorns carefully removed from the stems, and set in a bed of moss and sweetbrier leaves. It was such a bouquet, surely, as had never been presented to a bride before —if, indeed, it was intended for the bride.

That was soon to be seen. The great

organ was still pealing out Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March' (Mr. Tom had offered to give £10 to the poor-box of the choir if the choristers would play instead the Swedish 'Bring home the bride so fair!'—(forgetting that there were two brides, and that Edith was dark) when the first of the bridal procession came along, Edith and her husband and her bridesmaids. Then came Nan. As she was passing, the fresh-coloured wench timidly stepped forward and offered her the basket of wild roses. Nan stopped; glanced at her, and recognised her; and then, to the wonder of the crowd, they saw the young bride take the basket with her trembling white-gloved fingers, while the other hand was boldly put forward to shake hands with the country lass. Singing Sal was greatly taken aback; but she took Nan's hand for

the briefest second, and managed to say something quite incoherent about 'long life and happiness, Miss—I beg your pardon, Miss—Ma'am;' and then the gleaming procession passed on.

Nan was very proud of that basket of wild flowers. She would not part with it. She had it placed before her on the table when all the people had assembled and sat down. And perhaps there was one there who, looking alternately at the bright-eyed bride who sat beside him, and at that basket of wild roses, red, and white, and pink, and whitish-red and whitish-pink, may have said to himself that there was no red one there half so red as her lips, and no white one half so white as her clear and shining soul.

FINIS.

THE FOUR MACNICOLS

[NOTE.—The following sketch of the founding of a Co-operative Association by four Scotch boys, was originally meant for young people; but subsequently the writer ventured to think that it might prove equally interesting, or even more interesting, to grown-up folk, especially as parts of it are based on fact; and so it is now printed here for the first time.]

THE FOUR MACNICOLS.

CHAPTER I.

JUVENTUS MUNDI.

It was on a bright and glorious morning in July that the great chieftain, Robert of the Red Hand, accompanied by his kinsmen and allies, put to sea in his war-galley, resolved to sweep the Spanish main free of all his enemies, and thereafter to hold high revel in the halls of Eilean-na-Rona. At least, that was how it appeared to the imagination of the great chieftain himself, though the simple facts of the case were a trifle less romantic. For this Robert

of the Red Hand, more familiarly known as Rob MacNicol, or even as plain Rob, was an active, stout-sinewed, black-eyed lad of seventeen, whose only mark of chieftainship apparently was that, unlike his brothers, he wore shoes and stockings; these three relatives constituted his allies and kinsmen; the so-called Spanish main was in reality an arm of the sea better known in the Hebrides as Loch Scrone; and the war-galley was an old, ramshackle, battered, and be-tarred boat belonging generally to the fishing-village of Erisaig; for, indeed, the boat was so old and so battered that nobody now seemed to claim any special ownership of it.

These four MacNicols,—Robert, Neil, Nicol, and Duncan,—were, it must be admitted, an idle and graceless set, living for the most part a hand-to-mouth, amphibious,

curlew-like kind of life, and far more given to aimless voyages in boats not belonging to them than inclined to turn their hand to any honest labour. But this must be said in their excuse that no boy or lad born in the village of Erisaig could by any means whatsoever be brought to think of becoming anything else than a fisherman. It was impossible to induce them to apprentice themselves to any ordinary trade. They would wait until they were old enough to go after the herring, like the others; that was man's work; that was something like; that was different from staying ashore and twiddling one's fingers over a pair of somebody else's shoes, or laboriously shaping a block of sandstone for somebody else's house. This Rob MacNicol, for example: it was only for want of a greater career that he had constituted

himself a dreaded sea-rover, a stern chieftain, etc. etc. His secret ambition—his great and constant and secret ambition—went far farther than that. It was to be of man's estate, broad-shouldered and heavy-bearded; to wear huge black boots up to his thighs, and a blue flannel jersey; to have a peaked cap (not forgetting a brass button on each side by way of smartness); and then to come along, in the afternoon, with a yellow oil-skin tied up in a bundle, to the wharf where the herring fleet lay, the admiration and the envy of all the miserable creatures condemned to stay ashore.

In the meantime—in these days of joyous idleness, while as yet the cares and troubles which this history will have to chronicle were far away from him and his simply because they were unknown—Rob

MacNicol, if he could not be a fisherman, could be an imaginary chieftain, and in that capacity he gave his orders as one who knew how to make himself obeyed. As soon as they had shoved the boat clear of the smacks, the jib was promptly set; the big lumps of stone that served for ballast were duly shifted; the lug-sail, as black as pitch and full of holes, was hoisted, and the halyards made fast; then the sheet was hauled in by Nicol MacNicol, who had been ordered to the helm; and finally the shaky old nondescript craft began to creep through the blue waters of Erisaig Bay. It was a lovely morning; the light breeze from the land seemed steady enough; altogether, nothing could have been more auspicious for the setting out of the great chieftain and his kinsmen.

But great as he is, he is not above

fearing the criticism of people ashore on his method of handling a boat. Rob, from his proud position at the bow, darted an angry glance at his helmsman.

'Keep her full, will ye?' he growled in an undertone. 'Do ye call that steering, ye gomeril? Run her by Daft Sandy's boat! It is no better than a cowherd you are at the steering.'

This Daft Sandy, who will turn up in our history by-and-by, was a half-witted old man, who spent his life in fishing for flounders from a rotten old punt he had become possessed of. He earned a sort of living that way; and seldom went near the shore during the day except to beg for a herring or two for bait, when the boats came in. He got the bait, but in an ignominious way; for the boys, stripping the nets, generally saved up the 'broken'

herring in order to pelt Daft Sandy with the fragments when he came near. That is to say, they indulged in this amiable sport except when Rob MacNicol happened to be about. That youth had been heard to remark that the first he caught at this game would pay a sudden visit to the dead dog-fish lying beneath the clear waters of the harbour; and it was very well known among the urchins of Erisaig that the eldest MacNicol had very little scruple about taking the law into his own hand. When he found a bigger boy thrashing a smaller one, he invariably thrashed the bigger one, just to keep things even, as it were; and he had invented for the better guidance of his brethren and associates a series of somewhat stringent rules and punishments, to which, it must be acknowledged, he cheerfully submitted himself. At the

same time, he was aware that even the most moral and high-principled government has occasionally to assert itself with rude physical force; and although his hand was not particularly red, as might have been expected, it was uncommonly hard, and a cuff from it was understood to produce the most startling lightning effects in the region of the eye.

Well, as they were nearing Daft Sandy's punt, Rob called out to him.

'Sandy, have ye had any luck the day?'

The little, bent, blear-eyed old man looked up from his hand-lines.

'No mich.'

As the boat was gliding past Rob flung a couple of herring into the punt.

'There's some bait for ye.'

'Ay; and where are ye for going, Robert?' the old man said, as they

passed. 'Tak' heed. It's squally outside.'

There was no answer; for at this moment the quick eye of the chieftain detected one of his kinsmen in the commission of a heinous crime. Tempted by the light and steady breeze, Nicol had given way to idleness, and had made fast the main-sheet, instead of holding it in his hand, ready for all emergencies. This, and not unnaturally, on such a squally coast, Rob MacNicol had constituted an altogether unforgivable offence; and his first impulse was to jump down to the stern of the boat and give the helmsman, caught *in flagrante delicto*, a sounding whack on the side of the head. But a graver sense of justice prevailed. He summoned a court-martial. Nicol, catching the eye of his brother, hastily tried to undo the sheet

from the pin; but it was too late. The crime had been committed; there were two witnesses, besides the judge, who was also the jury. The judge and jury forthwith pronounced sentence: Nicol MacNicol to forfeit one penny to the fund being secretly stored up for the purchase of a set of bagpipes, or to be lowered by the shoulders until his feet should touch the ground in the dungeon of Eilean-na-Rona Castle. He was left to decide which alternative he would accept; and it must be said that the culprit, after a minute or two's sulking, perceived the justice of the sentence, and calmly said he would take the dungeon.

'Ye think I'm feared?' he said contemptuously, to Neil and Duncan, who were grinning at him. 'Wha was it that gruppit the whutteruck[1]? And is there

[1] *Anglicè*, seized hold of the weasel.

anything worse than whutterucks in that hole in the castle?'

'Ye'll find out, Nicol, my man,' said his cousin Neil. 'There's warlocks. And they'll grup ye by the legs.'

'I'll save the penny anyway,' said Nicol, to whom a penny was a thing of known and substantial value.

Now if any proof had been needed that Rob MacNicol's stringent sailing rules were a matter of stern necessity, it was quickly forthcoming. On this beautiful summer morning, with the sea smooth and blue around them, they were sailing along as pleasantly as might be. But they had scarcely got through the narrow channel leading from the harbour, and were just emerging into Loch Scrone, when a squall of wind came tearing along and hit the

boat so that the lug-sail was almost flattened on to the water.

'Run her up! Haul in your sheet!' yelled Rob to the frightened steersman.

Well it was at such a moment that the main sheet was free to be hauled in; for as the bow was put up to the wind, the varying squall caught her on the other beam and threw her over, so that she shipped a bucket or two of water. Had the water got into the belly of the sail, the weight would have dragged her down; but Rob instantly got rid of this danger by springing to the halyards, and, the moment the crank craft strove to right herself, bringing sail and yard rattling down into the boat. By this time, so fierce was the squall, a pretty heavy sea had sprung up, and altogether things looked very ugly. When they allowed the jib to fill, even that was enough

to send the boat over, and she had already a dangerous lot of water surging among the ballast; while, when they were forced to put her head to the wind, she drifted with a heavily running tide, and right to leeward was a long reef of rocks that would inevitably crunch her into matchwood. The younger brothers said not a word, but looked at Rob, ready to obey his slightest gesture, and Rob stood by the mast calling out from time to time to Nicol.

Matters grew worse. It was no use trying merely to keep her head to the wind, for she was drifting rapidly, and the first shock on the rocks would send her and her stone ballast to the bottom. On the other hand, there was no open sea-room to let her run away before the wind with a straining jib. At all hazards it was necessary to fight her clear of that long ledge of rock,

even if the wind threatened to tear the mast out of the boat. So Rob himself sprang down to the stern and took the tiller.

'Duncan, Neil, stand by the halyards now! When I sing out to ye, hoist her —be ready now!'

He had his eye on the rocks all this time. On the highest of them was a tall iron perch, painted scarlet—a warning to sailors; but from that point long shelves and spurs ran out, the yellow surface of barnacles growing greener and greener as they went deeper into the sea. Already Rob MacNicol could make out some of these submarine reefs, even through the turbulent water.

'Now then, boys; up with her! Quick now!'

It was a venturesome business; but

there was no help for it. The moment the sail was half hoisted, a gust caught the boat and drove her over until her gunwale again scooped up a lot of the hissing water. But as she righted, staggering all the while, it was clear there was some good way on her, and Rob, having had recourse to desperate remedies, was determined to give her enough of the wind. Down again went the gunwale to the hissing water; and the strain on the rotten sheets of the old boat was so great that it was a wonder everything did not go by the board. But now there was a joyous hissing of foam at the bow; she was forging ahead; if she could only stand the pressure, in a minute or so she would be clear of the rocks. Rob still kept his eye on these treacherous shelves of yellow-green. Then he sang out,

'Down with her, boys!'

The black lug-sail rattled into the boat; there was nothing left now but the straining jib.

'Slack the lee jib-sheet!'

The next minute he had put his helm gently up; the bow of the boat fell away from the wind; and presently—just as they had time to see the green depths of the rocks they had succeeded in weathering—the war-galley of the great chieftain was spinning away down Loch Scrone, racing with the racing waves, the wind tearing and hauling at her bellied-out jib.

'Hurrah, my lads! we'll soon be at Eilean-na-Rona now, eh?' Rob shouted.

He did not seem much put about by that narrow escape. Squalls were common on this coast, and it was the business of one aspiring to be a fisherman to take things as they came.

'Come, set to work and bale out the boat, you bare-shanks lot! How d'ye think she can sail with the half of Loch Scrone inside her?'

Thus admonished, the younger brothers were soon among the stone ballast baling out the surging water with such rude utensils as they could find. But the squall was of no great duration. The wind moderated in force; then it woke up again, and brought a smart shower of rain across; then, as if by magic, the heavens suddenly cleared, a burst of hot sunlight fell around them, the sea grew intensely blue, the far hills on the other side of Loch Scrone began to shine green in the yellow light, and all that was left to tell of the squall that had very nearly put an end to the great chieftain and all his clan was a quickly running sea, now all sparkling in diamonds.

The danger being thus over, Rob once more delivered the tiller into the charge of his brother Nicol, and went forward to his post of observation at the bow. About the only bit of the imaginative voyage on which he had started that had a solid basis in fact was the existence of an old castle—or rather the ruins of what had once been a castle—on the island called Eilean-na-Rona; and now that they were racing down Loch Scrone, that small island was drawing nearer, and already they could make out the dark tower and ivied walls of the ancient keep. Far darker than the tower itself were the legends connected with this stronghold of former times; but for these the brothers MacNicol, who had seized on the place as their own, cared little. It is true, they had some dread of the dungeon, and none of them would have

liked to visit Eilean-na-Rona at night; but in the daytime the old ruins formed an excellent retreat, where they could play such high jinks or hold such courtly tournaments as they chose.

They ran the boat into a little creek of the uninhabited island, driving her right up on the beach for safety's sake, there being no anchor. Then—Neil carrying a small basket the while and Duncan a coil of rope—they passed through a wood of young larches and spruce, the air smelling strongly of bracken and meadow-sweet after the rain; and finally they reached the rocky eminence on which stood the ruins. There was no way up, for tourists did not come that way, and the owner of the island, who was a farmer on the mainland, had but little care for antiquities. However, the lads found no difficulty. They swarmed up the

face of the crags like so many squirrels, and found themselves on a grassy plateau which had once formed the outer courtyard of the keep. Around this plateau were fragments of what in former days had been a massive wall, but most of the crumbling masonry was hidden under ivy and weeds. In front of them, again, rose the great tower with its arched and gloomy entrance, and its one or two small windows, in the clefts of which bunches of wallflower were growing. The only sign of life about the old castle or the uninhabited island was given by two or three jackdaws that wheeled about overhead, and cawed harshly in resentment of this intrusion.

The great chieftain, Robert of the Red Hand, having now assembled his kinsmen and allies in the ancient halls of Eilean-na-Rona, proceeded to speak as follows,

'Nicol, my man, ye have been tried and convicted.'

'I ken that,' was Nicol's philosophical reply.

'Ye had no business to make fast the sheet of the lug-sail; ye might have drooned the lot of us.'

Nicol nodded. He had sinned, and was prepared to suffer.

'Have ye ought to say against your being lowered into the dungeon?'

'I have not. Do you think I'm feared?' said Nicol scornfully.

'Ye will not pay the penny?'

'Deil a penny will I pay!'

'Nicol,' said his cousin Neil, with some touch of compassion—for indeed he knew that the dungeon was a gruesome place—'Nicol, maybe you have not got a penny?'

'Well, I have not,' said Nicol.

'Will I lend ye one?'

'What would be the use of that?' said Nicol; 'I would have to pay it back. Do you think I'm feared? I tell you I am not feared.'

So there was nothing for it but to get the rope and pass it under Nicol's arms, fastening it securely at his back. Thus bound, the culprit was marched through the archway of the old tower into an apartment that was but feebly lit by the reflected glare coming from without. The other boys, as well as Nicol, walked very carefully over the dank-smelling earth, until they came to what seemed to be a large hole dug out of the ground, and black as midnight. This was the dungeon into which Nicol was to be lowered, that he might expiate his offence before the high revels began.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAST OF THE GAMES.

But before proceeding to relate how the captive clansman was lowered into the dungeon of the castle on Eilean-na-Rona, it will be necessary to explain why he did not choose to purchase his liberty by the payment of the sum of one penny. Pennies among the boys of Erisaig, and more especially among the MacNicols, were an exceedingly scarce commodity. The father of the three MacNicols, who was also burdened with the charge of their orphan cousin Neil, was a hand on board the

steamer *Glenara Castle,* and very seldom came ashore. He had but small wages; and it was all he could do, in the bringing up of the boys, to pay a certain sum for their lodging and schooling, leaving them pretty much to cadge for themselves as regarded food and clothes. Their food, mostly porridge, potatoes, and fish of their own catching, cost little; and they did not spend much money on clothes, especially in summer time, when no Erisaig boy—except Rob MacNicol, who was a distinguished person—would submit to the encumbrance of shoes and stockings. Nevertheless, for various purposes, money was necessary to them; and this they obtained by going down in the morning, when the herring boats came in, and helping the men to strip the nets. The men were generally tired out and sleepy with

their long night's work; and if they had had anything like a good haul, they were glad to give these lads twopence or threepence apiece to undertake the labour of lifting the nets, yard by yard, out of the hold, shaking out the silvery fish and dexterously extricating those that had got more firmly enmeshed. Moreover, it was a work the boys delighted in. If it was not the rose, it was near the rose. If it was not for them as yet to sail away in the afternoon, watched by all the village, at least they could take this small part in the great herring trade. And when they had shaken out the last of the nets, and received their wages, they stepped ashore with a certain pride; and generally they put both hands in their pockets as a real fisherman would do; and perhaps they would walk along the quays with a slight lurch, as if

they, also, had been cramped up all the long night through, and felt somewhat unused to walking on first getting back to land.

Now these MacNicol boys, again imitating the well-to-do among the fishermen, had each an account at the savings' bank; and the pence they got were carefully hoarded up. For if they wanted a new Glengarry cap, or if they wanted to buy a book telling them of all kinds of tremendous adventures at sea, or if it became necessary to purchase some more fishing-hooks at the grocer's shop, it was their own small store of wealth they had to look to; and so it came about that a penny was something to be seriously considered. When Rob MacNicol had to impose a fine of one penny, he knew it was a dire punishment; and if there was any alternative, the fine was

rarely paid. The fund, therefore, which he had started for the purchase of an old and disused set of bagpipes, and which was to be made up of those fines, did not grow apace. Of course, being a chieftain, he must needs have a piper. The revels in the halls of Eilean-na-Rona lacked half their impressiveness through the want of the pipes. No doubt, Rob had a sort of suspicion that, if ever they should grow rich enough to buy the old set of bagpipes, he would have to play them himself; but even the most ignorant person can perceive that to be one's own piper must at least be better than to have no piper at all.

And now the captive Nicol MacNicol was led to the edge of this black pit in the floor of the lower hall of the castle. On several occasions one or other of the boys had been lowered, for slighter offences, into

this dungeon; but no one had ever been condemned to go to the bottom—if bottom there were. But Nicol did not flinch. He was satisfied of the justice of his sentence. He was aware he deserved the punishment. Above all he was determined to save that penny.

At the same time, when the other three had poised themselves so as to lower the rope gradually, and when he found himself descending into that black hole, he looked rather nervously below him. Of course he could see nothing. But there was a vague tradition that this dungeon was haunted by ghosts, vampires, warlocks, and other unholy things; and there was a chill, strange, earthy odour arising from it; and the walls that he scraped against were slimy and damp. He uttered no word, however; and those above kept slowly paying out the coil of rope.

Rob became somewhat concerned.

'It'll be no easy job to pull him back,' he said in a whisper.

'It's as deep as the dungeon they put Donald Gorm Mór into,' said his cousin Neil.

'Maybe there's no bottom at all,' said Duncan, rather awe-stricken.

Suddenly a fearful thing happened. There was a cry from below—a quick cry of alarm; and at the same moment they were startled by a wild whizzing and whirring around them, as if a legion of fiends had rushed out of the pit. With a shriek of fright Duncan sprang back from the edge of the dungeon; and that with such force that he knocked over his two companions. Moreover, in falling, they let go the rope; when they rose again they looked round in the twilight, but could find no

trace of it. It had slipped over the edge. And there was no sound from below.

Rob was the first to regain his senses. He rushed to the edge of the hole and stooped over.

'Nicol, are ye there?'

His heart jumped within him when he heard his brother's voice.

'Yes, I am; and the rope too. How am I to get up?'

Rob turned quickly.

'Duncan, down to the boat with ye! Loosen the lug-sail halyards, and bring them up—quick, quick!'

Duncan was off like a young roe. He slid down the crags; he dashed through the larch-wood; he jumped into the boat on the beach. Presently he was making his way as quickly back again, the halyards

coiled round his arm so as not to prevent his climbing.

'Nicol!' shouted Rob.

'Ay?'

'I am lowering the halyards to ye. Fasten them to the end of the rope.'

'I canna see them.'

'Grope all round till ye come to them.'

And so, in process of time, the end of the rope was hauled up, and thereafter—to the great relief of every one—and to his own, no doubt, Nicol appeared alive and well, though somewhat anxious to get away from the neighbourhood of that dungeon. He went immediately out into the warm summer air, followed by the others.

'Man, what a fright I got!' he said at last, having recovered his speech.

'Ay, and so did we,' Neil admitted.

'What was't?' said he, timidly; as if

almost afraid to put his own fears and suspicions into words.

'I dinna ken,' Neil said, looking rather frightened.

'Ye dinna ken!' Rob MacNicol said, with a scornful laugh. 'Ye ought to ken, then. It was nothing but a lot of bats; and Duncan yelled as if he had seen twenty warlocks; and knocked us over, so that we lost the rope. Come! boys, begin your games now; the steamer will be in early the day.'

Well, it seemed easier to dismiss superstitious fears out here in the sunlight. Perhaps it had been only bats, after all. Warlocks did not whirr in the air—at least, they were understood not to do so. Witches were supposed to reserve their aerial performances for the night-time. Perhaps it was only bats, as Rob asserted. Indeed, it

would be safer—especially in Rob's presence—to accept his explanation of the mystery. At the same time the younger boys occasionally darted a stealthy glance backward to that gloomy apartment that had so suddenly become alive with unknown things.

Then the games began. Rob had come to the conclusion that a wise chieftain should foster a love for national sports and pastimes; and to that end he had invented a system of marks, the winning of a large number of which entitled the holder to pecuniary or other reward. As for himself, his part was that of spectator and arbiter; he handicapped the competitors; he declared the prizes. On this occasion he ensconced himself in a niche of the ruins, where he was out of the glare of the sun, and gracefully surrounded by masses of

ivy; while his relatives hauled out to the middle of the green plateau several trunks of fir-trees, of various sizes, that had been carefully lopped and pruned for the purpose of 'tossing the caber.' Well, they 'tossed the caber,' they 'put the stone,' they had wrestling-matches and other trials of strength, Rob the while surveying the scene with a critical eye, and reckoning up the proper number of marks. But now some milder diversions followed. Three or four planks, rudely nailed together, and forming a piece of rough flooring about two or three yards square, were hauled out from an archway, placed on the grass, and a piece of tarpaulin thrown over it. Then two of the boys took out their Jew's-harps —alas! alas! that was the only musical instrument within their reach, until the coveted bagpipes should be purchased—

and gaily struck up with 'Green grow the rashes, O!' as a preliminary flourish. What was this now? What but a performance of the famous sword-dance by that renowned and valiant henchman, Nicol MacNicol of Erisaig, in the kingdom of Scotland! Nicol, failing a couple of broadswords or four dirks, had got two pieces of rusty old iron and placed them cross-wise on the extemporised floor. With what skill and nimbleness he proceeded to execute this sword-dance,—which is no doubt the survival of some ancient mystic rite,—with what elegance he pointed his toes and held his arms akimbo; with what amazing dexterity, in all the evolutions of the dance, he avoided touching the bits of iron; nay, with what intrepidity, at the most critical moment, he held his arms aloft and victoriously snapped his

thumbs, it wants a Homeric chronicler to tell. It needs only be said here that, after it, Neil's 'Highland Fling' was a comparative failure, though he, better than most, could give that outflung quiver of the foot which few can properly acquire, and without which the dancer of the 'Highland Fling' might just as well go home and go to bed. The great chieftain, having regarded these and other performances with an observant eye, and having awarded so many marks to this one and to that, declared the games over, and invited the competitors one and all to a royal banquet.

It was a good deal more wholesome than most banquets, for it consisted of a scone and a glass of fresh milk apiece—butter being as yet beyond the means of the MacNicols. And it was a good deal

more sensible than most banquets, for there was no speech-making after it. But there was some interesting conversation.

'Nicol, what did ye find in the dungeon?' Duncan said.

'Oh, man, it was a gruesome place,' said Nicol, who did not want to make too little of the perils he had encountered.

'What did ye see?'

'How could I see anything? But I felt plenty on the way down; and I'm sure it's fu' o' creeping things and beasts. And then when I was near the foot, I put my hand on something leevin', and it flew up and hit me; and in a meenit the whole place was alive. Man, what a noise it was! And then down came the rope, and I fell; and I got sich a clour on the head!'

'Nothing but bats!' said Rob, contemptuously.

'I think it was houlets,'[1] said Duncan, confidently; 'for there was one in the wood when I was gaun through, and I nearly ran my head against him. He was sitting in one of the larches—man, he made a noise!'

'Ye've got your heads filled with nothing but witches and warlocks the day!' said Rob, impatiently, as he rose to his feet. 'Come, and get the things into the basket. We maun be back in Erisaig before the *Glenara* comes in.'

Very soon thereafter the small party made their way down again to the shore, and entered the war-galley of the chieftain, the halyards being restored to their proper use. There were no more signs of any squall; but the light, steady breeze was contrary; and as Robert of the Red Hand

[1] *Anglicè*, owls.

was rather anxious to get back before the steamer should arrive, and as he prided himself on his steering, he himself took the tiller, his cousin Neil being posted as look-out forward.

It was a tedious business this beating up against the contrary wind; but there was nothing the MacNicols delighted in so much as in sailing, and they had grown to be expert in handling a boat. And it needed all their skill to get anything out of these repeated tacks with this old craft, that had a sneaking sort of fashion of falling away to leeward. However, they had the constant excitement of putting about; and the day was fine; and they were greatly refreshed after their arduous pastimes by that banquet of scones and milk. Nor did they know that this was to be the last day of their careless boyish idleness; that never

again would the great chieftain, heedless of what the morrow might bring forth, hold these high frolics in the halls of Eilean-na-Rona.

Patience and perseverance will beat even contrary winds; and at last, after one long tack stretching almost to the other side of Loch Scrone, they put about and managed to make the entrance to the harbour, just weathering the rocks that had nearly destroyed them on their setting out. But here another difficulty waited them. Under the shelter of the low-lying hills, the harbour was in a dead calm. No sooner had they passed the rocks than they found themselves on water as smooth as glass, and there were no oars in the boat. For this oversight Rob MacNicol was not responsible; the fact being that oars were valuable in Erisaig, and not easily to be

borrowed, whereas this old boat was at anybody's disposal. There was nothing for it but to sit and wait for a puff of wind.

Suddenly they heard a sound — the distant throbbing of the *Glenara's* paddles. Rob grew anxious. This old boat was right in the fairway of the steamer; and the question was whether, in coming round the point, she would see them in time to slow.

'I wish we were out of here,' said he.

As a last resource, he threw the tiller into the boat, took up the helm, and tried to use this as a sort of paddle. But this was scarcely of any avail; and they could hear, though they could not see, that the steamer was almost at the point.

The next moment she appeared; and it seemed to them in their fright that she was

almost upon them—towering away over them with her gigantic bulk. They heard the scream of the steam-whistle, and the sharp 'ping! ping!' of the indicator, as the captain tried to have the engines reversed.

It was too late. The way on the steamer carried her on, even when her paddles were stopped; and the next second her bows had gone clean into the old tarred boat, cutting her almost in two and heeling her over.

She sank at once. Then the passengers of the steamer rushed to the side to see what should become of the lads struggling in the water; the mate threw overboard to them a couple of life-buoys; and the captain shouted out to have a boat lowered. There was a great confusion.

Meanwhile, all this had been witnessed by the father of the MacNicols, who had

stood for a second or two as if paralysed. Then a sort of spasm of action seized him, and, apparently not knowing what he was about, he threw open the gangway abaft the paddle-box and sprang into the sea.

CHAPTER III.

ALTERED CIRCUMSTANCES.

Even with this big steamer coming right down on them, Rob MacNicol did not lose his head. He knew that his two brothers and his cousin Neil could swim like water-rats; and as for himself, though he would have given a good deal to get rid of his boots, he did not fear being able to get ashore.

But there was no time to think.

'Jump clear of the boat!' he shouted to his companions.

The next second came the dreadful

crash. The frail old boat seemed to be pressed onwards and downwards, as if the steamer had run right over her. Then Rob found himself in the water, and very deep in the water too. The next thing he perceived was a great greenish-white thing over his head; and as he knew that that was the hull of the steamer, he struck away from it with all the strength at his disposal. He remembered afterwards experiencing a sort of hatred of that shining green thing, and thinking it looked hideous and dangerous, like a shark.

However, the next moment he rose to the surface, blew the water out of his mouth, and looked around. There was a life-buoy within a yard of him, and the people on the steamer were calling to him to lay hold of it; but he had never touched one of these things, and he preferred to

trust to himself, heavy as he felt his boots to be. It was the others he was looking after. Neil, he perceived, was already off for the shore, swimming hand over hand, as if a sword-fish were after him. Nicol was being hauled up the side of the steamer at the end of a rope, just as he had been hauled up from the Eilean-na-Rona dungeon ; and his brother Duncan had seized hold of the helm that had been cast loose when the boat went down. Satisfied that every one was safe, Rob himself struck out for the side of the steamer, and was speedily hauled on board, presently finding himself on deck with his two dripping companions.

The strange thing was that his father was nowhere to be seen, and even the captain looked round and asked where John MacNicol was. At the same moment a woman, all trembling, came forward and

asked the mate if they had got the man out.

'What man?' said he.

She said she had been standing by the paddle-box, and that one of the sailors, the moment the accident had occurred, had opened the gangway and jumped into the water, no doubt with the intention of rescuing the boys. She had not seen him come up again, for just as he went down the steamer backed.

At this news there was some little consternation. The mate called aloud for John MacNicol; there was no answer. He ran to the other side of the steamer; nothing was visible on the smooth water. They searched everywhere, and the boat that had been lowered was pulled about, but the search was in vain. The woman's story was the only explanation of this strange

disappearance; but the sailors suspected more than they dared to suggest to the bewildered lads. They suspected that old MacNicol had dropped into the water just before the paddles had made their first backward revolution, and that in coming to the surface he had been struck by one of the floats. They said nothing of this, however; and as the search proved to be quite useless, the *Glenara* steamed slowly onward to the quay.

It was not until the next afternoon that they recovered the body of old MacNicol; and from certain appearances on the corpse, it was clear that he had been struck down by the paddles in his effort to reach and help his sons. That was a sad evening for Rob MacNicol. It was his first introduction to the cruel facts of life. And amid his sorrow for the loss of one who, in a sort

of rough and reticent way, had been very kind and even affectionate to him, Rob was vaguely aware that on himself now rested the responsibility for the upbringing of his two brothers and his cousin. He sat up late that night, long after the others were asleep, thinking of what he should do. In the midst of this silence the door was quietly opened, and Daft Sandy came into the small room.

'What do ye want at this time o' night?' said Rob angrily, for he had been startled.

The old, bent, half-witted man looked cautiously at the bed, in which Neil lay fast asleep.

'Whisht, Rob, my man,' he said in a whisper; 'I waited till every one in Erisaig was asleep. Ay, ay! it's a bad day this day for you. And what are ye going to do now, Rob? Ye'll be taking to the fishing?'

'Oh, ay; I'll be taking to the fishing!' said Rob bitterly, for he had been having his dreams also, and had turned from them with a sigh. 'Of course I'll be taking to the fishing! And maybe ye'll tell me where I am to get £40 to buy a boat, and where I am to get £30 to buy nets? Maybe ye'll tell me that, Sandy?'

'The bank——'

'What does the bank ken about me? They would as soon think of throwing the money into Loch Scrone.'

'But ye ken, Rob, Coll Macdougall would give ye a share in his boat for £12.'

'Twelve pounds! Man, ye're just daft, Sandy. Where am I to get £12?'

'Well, well, Rob,' said the old man coming nearer, and speaking still more mysteriously, 'listen to what I tell ye. Some day or other ye'll be taking to the fishing;

and when that day comes I will put something in your way. Ay, ay; the fishermen about Erisaig dinna know everything; come to me, Rob, my man, and I'll tell ye something about the herring. Ye are a good lad, Rob; many's the herring I've got from ye when I wouldna go near the shore for they mischievous bairns; and when once ye have a boat and nets o' your own I will tell ye something. Daft Sandy is no so daft, maybe. Have ye ony tobacco, Rob?'

Rob said he had no tobacco; and making sure that Daft Sandy had come to him with a pack of nonsense merely as an excuse to borrow money for tobacco, he bundled him out of the house and went to bed.

Rob was anxious that his brothers and cousin, and himself, should present a re-

spectable appearance at the funeral; and in these humble preparations nearly all their small savings were swallowed up. The funeral expenses were paid by the Steamboat Company. Then after the funeral, the few people who were present departed to their own homes, no doubt imagining that the MacNicol boys would be able to live as hitherto they had lived—that is, anyhow.

But there was a kindly man called Jamieson, who kept the grocery shop, and he called Rob in as the boys passed home.

'Rob,' said he, 'ye maun be doing something now. There's a cousin of mine has a whisky shop in the Saltmarket in Glasgow, and I could get ye a place there.'

Rob's very gorge rose at the notion of his having to serve in a whisky shop in Glasgow. That would be to abandon all

the proud ambitions of his life. Nevertheless, he had been thinking seriously about the duty he owed to these lads, his companions, who were now dependent on him. So he swallowed his pride and said,

'How much would he give me?'

'I think I could get him to give ye four shillings a week. That would keep ye very well.'

'Keep me?' said Rob. 'Ay, but what's to become o' Duncan and Neil and Nicol?'

'They must shift for themselves,' the grocer answered.

'That winna do,' said Rob, and he left the shop.

He overtook his companions and asked them to go along to some rocks overlooking the harbour. They sat down there—the harbour below them with all its pictur-

esque boats, and masses of drying nets, and what not.

'Neil,' said Rob to his cousin, 'we'll have to think about things now. There will be no more Eilean-na-Rona for us. We have just about as much left as will pay the lodgings this week, and Nicol must go three nights a week to the night school. What we get for stripping the nets 'll no do now.'

'It will not,' said Neil.

'Mr. Jamieson was offering me a place in Glasgow, but it is not very good, and I think we will do better if we keep together. Neil,' said he, 'if we had only a net, do ye not think we could trawl for cuddies?'[1]

And again he said, 'Neil, do ye not

[1] 'Cuddies' is the familiar name in those parts for young saithe. 'Trawling,' again, means there the use of an ordinary seine.

think we could make a net for ourselves out of the old rags lying at the shed?'

And again he said, 'Do ye think that Peter, the tailor, would lend us his old boat for a shilling a week?'

It was clear that Rob had been carefully considering the details of this scheme of co-operation. And it was eagerly welcomed, not only by Neil, but also by the brothers Duncan and Nicol, who had been frightened by the thought of Rob going away to Glasgow. The youngest of all, Nicol, boldly declared that he could mend nets as well as any man in Erisaig.

No sooner was the scheme thoroughly discussed, than it was determined, under Rob's direction, to set to work at once. The woman who kept the lodgings and cooked their food for them had intimated to them that they need be in no hurry to

pay her for a week or two until they should find some employment; but they had need of money, or the equivalent of money, in other directions. Might not old Peter, who was a grumbling and ill-tempered person, insist on being paid in advance? Then, before they could begin to make a net out of the torn and rejected pieces lying about the shed, they must needs have a ball of twine. So Rob bade his brothers and cousin go away and get their rude fishing-rods and betake themselves to the rocks at the mouth of the harbour, and see what fish they could get for him during the afternoon.

Meanwhile he himself went along to the shed which was used as a sort of storage-house by some of the fishermen; and here he found lying about plenty of pieces of net that had been cast aside in the pro-

cess of mending. This business of mending the nets is the last straw on the back of the tired-out fisherman. When he has met with an accident to his nets during the night, when he has fouled on some rocks in dragging them in, for example, it is a desperately fatiguing affair to set to work to mend them when he gets ashore, dead beat with the labours of the morning, The fishermen, for what reason I do not know, will not entrust this work to their wives; they will rather, after having been out all night, keep at it themselves, though they drop off to sleep every few minutes. It is not to be wondered at, then, that often, instead of trying to laboriously mend holes here or there, they should cut out a large piece of torn net bodily and tack on a fresh piece. The consequence is, that in a place like Erisaig there is generally

plenty of netting to be got for the asking; which is a good thing for gardeners who want to protect currant bushes from the blackbirds, and who will take the trouble to patch the pieces together.

Rob was allowed to pick out a large number of pieces that he thought might serve his purpose; and these he carried off home. But then came the question of floats and sinkers. Sufficient pieces of cork to form the floats might in time be got about the beach; but the sinkers had all been removed from the cast-away netting. In this extremity, Rob bethought of rigging up a couple of guy-poles, as the salmon-fishers call them, one for each end of the small seine he had in view; so that these guy-poles, with a lump of lead at the lower end, would keep the net vertical while it was being dragged through the

water. All this took up the best part of the afternoon; for he had to cadge about before he could get a couple of stout poles; and he had to bargain with the blacksmith for a lump of lead. Then he walked along to the point where the other MacNicols were busy fishing.

They had been lucky with their lines and bait. On the rocks beside them lay two or three small codling, a large flounder, two good-sized lythe, and nearly a dozen saithe. Rob got hold of these; washed them clean to make them look fresh and smart; put a string through their gills, and marched off with them to the village.

He felt no shame in trying to sell fish: was it not the whole trade of the village? He walked into the grocer's shop.

'Will ye buy some fish?' said he, 'they're fresh.'

The grocer looked at them.

'What do you want?'

'A ball of twine.'

'Let me tell ye this, Rob,' said the grocer, severely, 'that a lad in your place should be thinking of something else than fleein' a dragon.'[1]

'I dinna want to flee any dragon,' said Rob, 'I want to mend a net.'

'Oh, that is quite different,' said the grocer; and then he added, with a good-natured laugh, 'Are ye going to be a fisherman, Rob?'

'I will see,' Rob said.

So he had his ball of twine—and a very large one it was. Off he set to his companions.

'Come away, boys, I have other work for ye. Now, Nicol, my man, ye'll show

[1] 'Fleein' a dragon'—flying a kite.

us what ye can do in the mending of nets. Ye havena been telling lies?'

Well, it took them several days of very hard and constant work before they rigged up something resembling a small seine; and then Rob affixed his guy-poles; and they went to the grocer and got from him a lot of old rope on the promise to give him a few fresh fish whenever they happened to have a good haul. Then Rob proceeded to his fateful interview with Peter the tailor.

Peter was a sour-visaged, gray-headed old man, who wore horn-rimmed spectacles. He was sitting cross-legged on his bench when Rob entered.

'Peter, will ye lend me your boat?'

'I will not.'

'Why will ye no lend me the boat?'

'Do I want it sunk, as ye sunk that

boat the other day? Go away with ye. Ye're an idle lot, you MacNicols. Ye'll be drooned some day.'

'We want it for the fishing, Peter,' said Rob, who took no notice of the tailor's ill-temper. 'I'll give ye a shilling a week for the loan o't.'

'A shilling a week!' said Peter with a laugh. 'A shilling a week! Where's your shilling?'

'There,' said Rob, putting it plump down on the bench.

The tailor looked at the shilling; took it up, bit it, and put it in his pocket.

'Very well,' said he, 'but mind, if ye sink my boat, ye'll have three pounds to pay.'

Rob went back eager and joyous. Forthwith, a thorough inspection of the boat was set about by the lads in con-

junction; they tested the oars; they tested the thole-pins; they had a new piece of cork put into the bottom. For that evening, when it grew a little more towards dusk, they would make their first cast with their net.

Yes; and that evening, when it had quite turned to dusk, the people of Erisaig were startled with a new proclamation. It was Neil MacNicol, standing in front of the cottages, and boldly calling forth these words:

'Is there any one wanting Cuddies? There are Cuddies to be sold at the West Slip, for a Sixpence a Hunderd!"

CHAPTER IV.

FURTHER ENDEAVOUR.

That was indeed an anxious time when the four MacNicols proceeded to try the net on which they had spent so much forethought and labour. They had no great expectation of catching fish this evening; their object was rather to try whether the ropes would hold, whether the floats would be sufficient, and whether Rob's guy-poles would keep the net vertical. So they got into the tailor's boat, and rowed away round the point to a sandy bay where they

had nothing to fear from rocks on this their first experiment.

It was, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter, nearly dusk — an excellent time for catching saithe, if saithe were about. The net had been carefully placed in the stern of the boat, so that it would run out easily, the rope attached to the guy-pole neatly coiled on the top. Rob was very silent as his two brothers pulled away at the long oars. He knew what depended on this trial. They had just enough money left to settle with their landlady on the following evening; and Nicol's school-fees had to be paid in advance.

They rowed quietly into this little bay, which, though of a sandy bottom, was pretty deep. Rob had resolved to take the whole responsibility of the experiment

on himself. He landed his brothers and his cousin, giving the latter the end of the rope attached to the guy-pole; then he quietly pulled away again from the shore.

When the length of the rope was exhausted, he himself took the guy-pole and gently dropped it over, to prevent splashing; and as he did so the net began to pay out. He pulled slowly, just to see how the thing would work; and it seemed to work very well. The net went out freely, and apparently sank properly; from the top of the guy-pole to the stern of the boat you could see nothing but the line of the floats on the smooth water. But the net was a small one: soon it would be exhausted; so Rob began to pull round towards the shore again. At the same time Neil, who had had his instructions, began to haul in his end of the net gently,

so that by and by, when Rob had run the boat on the beach, and jumped out with his rope in his hand, the line of floats began to form a semicircle that was gradually narrowing and coming nearer the shore.

It was a moment of great excitement, and not a word was spoken. For although this was ostensibly only a trial to see how the net would work, each lad in his secret heart was wondering whether there might not be a haul of fish captured from the mysterious deep ; and not one of them, not Rob himself, could tell whether this very considerable weight they were gradually pulling in was the weight of the net merely, or the weight of fish, or the weight of seaweed.

The semicircle of the floats came nearer and nearer, all eyes striving to pierce the clear water.

'I hope the rope'll no break,' said Rob, anxiously, for the weight was great.

'And it's only seaweed!' said Duncan, in a tone of great disappointment.

But Rob's eye had been caught by some unusual appearance in the water. It seemed troubled somehow; and more especially near the line of floats.

'Is it?' said he; and he hastily bade Duncan take the rope and haul it gently in. He himself began to take up handfuls of small stones, and fling them into the sea close by the two guy-poles, so that the fish should be frightened back into the net. And as the semicircle grew still smaller, it was very obvious that, though there might be seaweed in the net, it was not all seaweed. By this time the guy-poles had been got ashore; they were now hauling at the net itself.

'Quicker now, boys!' Rob called out. 'Man alive, look at that!'

All the space of water now enclosed by the net was seen to be in a state of commotion; the net itself was being violently shaken; here and there a fish leapt into the air.

'Steady, boys! Don't jerk, or ye'll tear the net to bits!' Rob called out in great excitement.

For behold! when they had hauled this great weight up on the shore with a final swoop, there was something there that almost bewildered them—a living mass of fish floundering about in the wet seaweed—some springing into the air—others flopping out on to the sand—many helplessly entangled in the meshes. It was a wonderful sight; but their astonishment and delight had to give place to action.

'Run for the boat, Nicol! There's more where they came from!' Rob shouted.

Nicol rushed along to the boat; shoved her out; pulled her along to where his companions were; and backed her, stern in. They had no bucket; they had to fling the fish into the bottom of the boat. But this business of stripping the nets—shaking out the seaweed and freeing the enmeshed fish—was familiar to them; and they all worked with a will. There was neither a dog-fish nor a conger in all the haul, so they had no fears for their hands. In less than a quarter of an hour the net was back in the boat, properly arranged, and Rob ready to start again—at a place farther along the beach.

They were soon full of eagerness. In fact, they were too eager; and this time they hauled in with such might and main

that, just as the guy-poles were nearing the shore, the rope attached to one of them broke. But Rob instantly jumped into the water, seized the pole itself, and hauled it out with him. Here, also, they had a considerable take of fish; but there was a heavy weight of seaweed besides; and one or two rents showed that they had pulled the net over rocks. So they went back to their former ground; and so successful were they, and so eagerly did they work, that when the coming darkness warned them to return to Erisaig, they had the stern of the boat nearly full of very fairly-sized saithe.

Neil regarded this wonderful treasure of the deep, as he laboured away at his oar.

'Man, Rob, who could have expected such a lot? And what will ye do with

them now? Will ye send them to Glasgow by the *Glenara?*—I think Mr. M'Aulay would lend us a box or two. Or will ye clean them and dry them, and sell them from a barrow?'

'We canna start two or three trades all at once,' said Rob, after a minute or two. 'I think we'll sell them straight off, if the folk are no in bed. Ye'll gang and see, Neil; and I'll count the fish at the slip.'

'And what will I say ye will take for them?'

'I think I would ask a sixpence a hundred,' said Rob, slowly; for he had been considering that question for the last ten minutes.

At length they got in to the slip; and Neil at once proceeded to inform the inhabitants of Erisaig, who were still lounging about in the dusk, that for sixpence

a hundred they could have fine fresh 'cuddies.' It might be thought that in a place like Erisaig, which was one of the headquarters of the herring-trade, it would be difficult to sell fish of any description. But the fact was that the herring were generally contracted for by the agents of the salesmen, and shipped directly for Glasgow, so that they were but rarely retailed in Erisaig itself; moreover, people accustomed to herring their whole life through preferred variety—a freshly-caught mackerel, or flounder, or what not. Perhaps, however, it was more curiosity than anything else that brought the neighbours along to the west slip, to see what the MacNicols had been about.

Well, there was a good deal of laughing and jeering, especially on the part of the men (these were idlers: the fishermen

were all gone away in the boats); but the women, who had to provide for their households, knew when they had a cheap bargain; and the sale of the 'cuddies' proceeded briskly. Indeed, when the people had gone away again, and the four lads were by themselves on the quay, there was not a single 'cuddy' left—except a dozen that Rob had put into a can of water, to be given to the grocer in the morning as part payment for the loan of the ropes.

'What do ye make it altogether?' said Neil to Rob, who was counting the money.

'Three shillings and ninepence.'

'Three shillings and ninepence! Man, that's a lot. Will ye put it in the savings-bank?'

'No, I will not,' said Rob. 'I'm no

satisfied with the net, Neil. We must have better ropes all the way round; and whatever money we can spare we maun spend on the net. Man, think of this now: if we were to fall in with a big haul of herring or Johnnie-Dories, and lose them through the breaking of the net, I think ye would jist sit down and greet.'

It was wise counsel, as events showed. For one afternoon, some ten days afterwards, they set out as usual. They had been having varying success; but they had earned more than enough to pay their landlady, the tailor, and the schoolmaster; and every farthing beyond these necessary expenses they had spent on the net. They had replaced all the rotten pieces with sound twine; they had got new ropes; they had deepened it, moreover, and added some more sinkers to help the guy-poles.

Well, on this afternoon, Duncan and Nicol, being the two youngest, were as usual pulling away to one of the small quiet bays, and Rob was idly looking around him, when he saw something on the surface of the sea at some distance off that excited a sudden interest. It was what the fishermen call 'broken water'—a seething produced by a shoal of fish.

'Look, look, Neil!' he cried. 'It's either mackerel or herring; will we try for them?'

The greatest excitement at once prevailed on board. The younger brothers pulled their hardest to make for that rough patch on the water. Rob undid the rope from the guy-pole, and got this last ready to drop overboard. He knew very well that they ought to have had two boats to execute this manœuvre; but was there not

a chance for them if they were to row hard, in a circle, and pick up the other end of the net when they came to it? So Neil took a third oar: two rowing one side and one the other was just what they wanted.

They came nearer and nearer that strange hissing of the water. They kept rather away from it; and Rob quietly dropped the guy-pole over, paying out the net rapidly, so that it should not be dragged after the boat. Then the three lads pulled hard, and in a circle, so that at last they were sending the bow of the boat straight towards the floating guy-pole. The other guy-pole was near the stern of the boat, the rope made fast to one of the thwarts. In a few minutes Rob had caught this first guy-pole: they were now possessed of the two ends of the net.

But the water had grown suddenly quiet. Had the fish dived and escaped them? There was not the motion of a fin anywhere; and yet the net seemed heavy to haul.

'Rob,' said Neil, almost in a whisper, 'we've got them!'

'We havena got them,' was the reply; 'but they're in the net. Man, I wonder if it'll stand out.'

Then it was that the diligent patching and the strong tackle told. The question was not with regard to the strength of the net, it was rather with regard to the strength of the younger lads; for they had succeeded in enclosing a goodly portion of a large shoal of mackerel, and the weight seemed more than they could get into the boat. But even the strength of the younger ones seemed to grow into the

strength of giants when they saw through the clear water a great moving mass like quicksilver. And then the wild excitement of hauling in; the difficulty of it; the danger of the fish escaping; the warning cries of Rob; the clatter made by the mackerel; the possibility of swamping the boat altogether, as all the four were straining their utmost at one side. Indeed, by an awkward tilt at one moment some hundred or two of the mackerel were seen to glide away; but perhaps that rendered it all the more practicable to get into the boat what remained. When that heaving, sparkling, jerking mass of quicksilver at last was captured—shining all through the brown meshes of the net—the younger lads sat down quite exhausted, wet through, and happy.

'Man, Rob, what do ye think of that?' said Neil, in amazement.

'What do I think?' said Rob; 'I think that if we could get two or three more hauls like that I would soon buy a share in Coll MacDougall's boat and go after the herring.'

They had no more thought that afternoon of 'cuddy'-fishing after this famous take. Rob and Neil—the younger ones having had their share—rowed back to Erisaig; then Rob left the boat at the slip, and walked up to the office of the fish-salesman.

'What will ye give me for mackerel?' he said.

The salesman laughed at him, thinking he had caught a few with rods and flies.

'I'm no buying mackerel,' said he; 'no by the half-dozen.'

'I have half a boat-load,' said Rob.

The salesman glanced towards the slip, and saw the tailor's boat pretty low in the water.

'Is that mackerel?'

'Yes, it is mackerel.'

'Where were you buying them?'

'I was not buying them anywhere. I caught them myself—my brothers and me.'

'I do not believe you.'

'I cannot help that, then,' said Rob. 'But where had I the money to buy mackerel from any one?'

The salesman glanced at the boat again.

'I'll go down to the slip with you.'

So he and Rob together walked down to the slip, and the salesman had a look at the mackerel. Apparently he had arrived at the conclusion that, after all, Rob was not

likely to have bought a cargo of mackerel as a commercial speculation.

'Well, I will buy the mackerel from you,' he said. 'I will give you half-a-crown the hundred for them.'

'Half-a-crown!' said Rob. 'I will take three-and-sixpence the hundred for them.'

'I will not give it to you. But I will give you three shillings the hundred, and a good price, too.'

"Very well, then,' said Rob.

So the MacNicols got altogether £2 : 8s. for that load of mackerel; and out of that Rob spent the eight shillings on still further improving the net; the £2 going into the savings bank. It is to be imagined that after this they kept a pretty sharp look-out for 'broken water;' but of course they could not expect to run across a shoal of mackerel every day.

However, as time went on, with bad luck and with good, and by dint of hard and constant work whatever the luck was, the sum in the savings bank slowly increased; and at last Rob announced to his companions that they had saved enough to enable him to purchase a share in Coll MacDougall's boat. Neil and Duncan and Nicol were sorely disinclined to part with Rob; but yet they saw clearly enough that he was getting too old to remain at the cuddy-fishing, and they knew they could now work that line of business quite well by themselves. What Rob said was this:

'You see it is a great chance for all of us that I should get a share in the boat; for what I make at the herring-fishing will go into the bank along with what you make at the trawling by the shore. And who knows, if we all work hard enough, who

knows but we may have a herring-skiff all to ourselves some day? And that would be a fine thing to have a herring-skiff to ourselves, and our own nets; and all that we earned our own, and not in debt to any one whatever.'

Of course that was a dream of the future; for a herring-skiff costs a considerable sum of money, and so do nets. But in the meantime they were all agreed that what Rob counselled was wise; and a share in Coll MacDougall's boat was accordingly purchased, after a great deal of bargaining.

A proud lad was Rob MacNicol the afternoon he came along to the wharf to take his place in the boat that was now partly his own. His brothers and cousin were there to see him (envious a little, perhaps; but proud also, for part of their money

had gone to buy the share). He had likewise purchased second-hand a huge pair of boots that were as soft and pliable as grease could make them; and he carried a brand-new yellow oilskin in his hand that crackled as he walked. Neil, Duncan, and Nicol watched him throw his oilskin into the boat, and go forward to the bow, and take his place there at the oar; and they knew very well that if there was any one who could pull a huge oar better than Rob MacNicol, it was not in Erisaig that that person was to be found. Then the big herring-skiff passed away out to the point in the red glow of the evening; and Rob had achieved the first great ambition of his life.

CHAPTER V.

THE HIGH ROAD.

That was not a very good year for the herring-fishing on this part of the coast; but at all events Rob MacNicol learned all the lore of the fishermen, and grew as skilled as any of them in guessing at the whereabouts of the herring; while at the end of the season he had more than replaced the £12 he had used of the common fund. Then he returned to the tailor's boat, and worked with his brothers and cousin. He was proud to know that he had a share in a fishing-skiff; but he was

not too proud to turn his hand to anything else that might help.

These MacNicol boys had grown to be greatly respected in Erisaig. The audacity of four 'wastrel laddies' setting up to be fishermen on their own account had at first amused the neighbours; but their success and their conduct generally, soon raised them above ridicule; and the women especially were warm in their commendation. They saw how Rob gradually improved the appearance of his brothers and cousin. All of them had boots and stockings now. Not only that, but they had white shirts and jackets of blue cloth to go to church with on Sunday; and each of them put twopence in the collection-plate just as if they had all been sons of a rich shopkeeper. Moreover, they were setting an example to the other boys about. Four of these, in-

deed, combined to start a cuddy-fishing business similar to that of Rob's. Neil was rather angry; but Rob was not afraid of any competition. He asked the new boys to come and see how he had rigged up the guy-poles. He said there were plenty of fish in the sea; and the market was large enough. But when the new boys asked him to lend them some money to buy new ropes he distinctly declined. He had got on without borrowing himself.

It was a long and dreary winter; but Nicol had nearly finished with his schooling; and the seine-net had been largely added to; and every inch of it overhauled. Then the cuddy-fishing began again; and soon Rob, who was now nearly eighteen, and remarkably firm-set for his age, would be away after the herring.

One day, as Rob was going along the

main thoroughfare of Erisaig, the banker called him into his office.

'Rob' said he, 'have ye seen the skiff[1] at the building-yard?'

'Ay,' said Rob rather wistfully, for many a time he had stood and looked at the beautiful lines of the new craft. 'She's a splendid boat.'

'And ye've seen the new drift-net in the shed?'

'Ay, I have that.'

'Well, ye see, Rob,' continued Mr. Bailie, regarding him with a good-natured look; 'I had the boat built and the net bought as a kind of speculation; and I was thinking of getting a crew through from Tarbert. They say the herring are begin-

[1] Though the herring-skiffs are so-called, they are comparatively large and powerful boats, and will stand a heavy sea.

ning to come about some of the western lochs. Now I have been hearing a good deal about you, Rob, from the neighbours. They say that you, and your brothers and cousin, are sober and diligent lads; and that you are good seamen, and careful. Then you have been a while at the herring fishing yourself. Now do you think you could manage that new boat?'

'Me!' said Rob, with his eyes staring, and his face aflame.

'I go by what the neighbours say, Rob. They say ye are a prudent lad, not over venturesome; and I think I could trust my property to ye. What say ye?'

In his excitement at the notion of being made master of such a beautiful craft, Rob forgot the respect he ought to have shown in addressing so great a person as the banker. He blurted out—

'Man, I would just like to try!'

'I will pay ye a certain sum per week while the fishing lasts,' continued Mr. Bailie, 'and ye will hire what crew ye think fit. Likewise I will give ye a percentage on the takes. Will that do?'

Rob was quite bewildered. All he could say was—

'I am obliged to ye, sir. Will ye wait for a minute till I see Neil.'

And very soon the wild rumour ran through Erisaig that no other than Rob MacNicol had been appointed master of the new skiff, the *Mary of Argyle;* and that he had taken his brothers and cousin as his crew. Some of the women shook their heads; and said it was a shame to let such mere lads go to the herring-fishing—for some night or other they would be drowned; but the men, who knew some-

thing of Rob's seamanship, had no fear at all; and their only doubt was about the younger lads being up to the heavy work of hauling in the nets in the morning.

But their youth was a fault that would mend week by week. In the meantime, Rob, having sold out his share in MacDougall's boat, bought jerseys and black boots and yellow oil-skins for his companions; so that the new crew, if they were rather slightly built, looked smart enough, as they went down to the slip to overhaul the *Mary of Argyle.*

With what a pride they regarded the long and shapely lines of her—the yellow beams shining with varnish; the tall mast at the bow, with its stout cordage; the brand-new stove, that was to boil their tea for them in the long watches of the night; the magnificent oars; the new sheets and

sails—everything spick and span. And this great mass of ruddy netting lying in the shed, with its perfect floats and accurate sinkers—this was not like the makeshift that had captured the cuddies.

Then on the morning that the *Mary of Argyle* put to sea on her trial trip, her owner was on board; but he merely sat on a thwart. It was Rob who was at the tiller; Rob wanted to try the boat; the owner wanted to observe the crew. And first of all she sailed lightly out of the harbour, with the wind on her beam; then outside, the breeze being fresher, they let her away down Loch Scrone, with the brilliant new lug-sail bellying out; then they brought her round, and fought her up against the stiff wind—Rob's brief words of command being obeyed with the rapidity of lightning.

'Well, what do ye think of her?' said Mr. Bailie to his young skipper.

Rob's face was aglow with pride.

'I think she's like a race-horse!' he said. 'I think she would lick any boat in Erisaig Bay.'

'But it is not to run races I have handed her over to ye. You must be careful, Rob; and run back if there's any squally weather about. I'll no be vexed if you're over cautious. For ye know if anything was to happen to one of they lads, the people would say I had done wrong in lippening[1] a boat to such a young crew.'

'Well, sir,' said Rob, boldly, 'ye have seen them work the boat. Do they look like lads who do not know what sailing a boat is?'

Mr. Bailie laughed, and said no more.

[1] *lippening*—trusting.

Then came the afternoon on which they were to set out for the first time after the herring. All Erisaig came out to see; and Rob was a proud lad as he stepped on board (with the lazy indifference of the trained fisherman very well imitated) and took his seat as stroke oar. The afternoon was lovely; there was not a breath of wind; the setting sun shone over the bay; and the *Mary of Argyle* went away across the shining waters with the long white oars dipping with the precision of clock-work. It was not until they were at the mouth of the harbour that something occurred which seemed likely to turn this brave setting-out into ridicule.

This was Daft Sandy, who rowed his punt right across the path of the *Mary of Argyle*, and, as she came up, called to Rob.

'What is it ye want?' Rob called to him.

'I want to come on board, Rob,' the old man said, as he now rowed his punt up to the stern of the skiff.

'I have no tobacco, and I have no whisky,' Rob said impatiently. 'There'll be no tobacco or whisky on board this boat so long as I have anything to do with her; so ye needna come for that, Sandy.'

'It's no for that,' said Daft Sandy, as, with the painter of his boat in one hand, he gripped the stern of the skiff with the other.

Now Rob was angry. Many of the Erisaig people would still be watching their setting-out; and was it to be supposed that they had taken this doited old body as one of the crew? But then Daft Sandy was at this moment clambering into the boat; and Rob could not get up and fight with an old man, who would probably tumble into the water.

'Rob,' said he, in a whisper, as he fastened the painter of his punt, 'I promised I would tell ye something. I'll show ye how to find the herring.'

'You!' said Rob, derisively.

'Ay, me, Rob, I'll make a rich man of you. I will tell you something about the herring that not any one in Erisaig knows —that not any one in Scotland knows.'

'Why havena ye made a rich man of yourself, Sandy?' said Rob, with more good nature.

The half-witted creature did not seem to see the point of this remark.

'Ay, ay,' he said, 'many is the time I was thinking of telling this one or telling that one; but when I would go near it was always 'Daft Sandy!' and 'Daft Sandy!' and there was always the peltin' wi' the broken herring—except from you, Rob.

And I was saying to myself that when Rob MacNicol has a boat of his own, then I will show him how to find the herring, and no one will know but himself.'

By this time the MacNicols had taken to their oars again; and they had pulled outside the harbour, the old punt still astern. Then Rob had to speak plainly.

'Look here, Sandy, I will not put ye ashore by force. But I canna have your punt at the stern of the boat. It'll be in the way of the nets.'

But the old man was more eager than ever. If they would only pull into the bay hard by, he would anchor the punt and leave it. He begged Rob to take him for that night's fishing. He had discovered a sure sign of the presence of herring—unknown to any of the fishermen. What was the phosphorescence in the sea?—the

nights were too clear for that. What was the mere breaking of the water?—a moving shoal that might escape. But this sign that the old man had discovered went to show the presence of large masses of the fish, stationary and deep: it was the appearance on the surface of the water of small air-bubbles. He was sure of it. He had watched it. It was a secret worth a bankful of money. And again, he besought Rob to let him accompany him; Rob had stopped the lads when they were throwing herring at him; Rob alone should have the benefit of this valuable discovery of his.

Rob MacNicol was doubtful; for he had never heard of this thing before; but he could not resist the importunities of the old half-witted creature. They pulled in and anchored the punt; then they set forth again, rowing slowly as the light

faded out of the sky, and keeping a watch all around on the almost glassy seas.

There was no sign of any herring; no solan geese sweeping down; no breaking of the water; and none of the other boats, so far as they could make out, had as yet shot their nets. The night was coming on, and they were far away from Erisaig; but still old Sandy kept up his watch, studying the surface of the water, as if he expected to find pearls floating there. And at last, in great excitement, he grasped Rob's arm. Leaning over the side of the boat, they could just make out in the dusk a great quantity of minute air-bubbles rising to the surface of the sea.

'Put some stones along with the sinkers, Rob,' the old man said in a whisper, as if he were afraid of the herring hearing; 'go deep, deep, deep.'

Well, they quietly let out the seemingly interminable drift-net as they pulled gently along, and when that was accomplished they took in the long oars again. Nicol lit up the little stove, and proceeded to boil the tea. The bundle containing their supper was opened, and Sandy had his share and his can of tea like the others.

They had a long time of waiting to get over through the still summer night, but still Rob was strangely excited, wondering whether Sandy had really, in pottering about, discovered a new indication of the whereabouts of the herring, or whether he was to go back to Erisaig in the morning with empty nets. There was another thing too. Had he shown himself too credulous before his companions? Had he done right in listening to what might be only a foolish tale? The others began to doze

off; Rob not. He did not sleep a wink all night.

Well, to let out a long drift-net, which sometimes goes as deep as fifteen fathoms, is an easy affair, but to haul it in again is a sore task; and when it happens to be laden, and heavily-laden, with silver-gleaming fish, that is a break-back business for four young lads. But there is such a thing as the nervous, eager, joyous, strength of success; and if you are hauling in yard after yard of a dripping net, only to find the brown meshes all bestarred with the silver herring,—then even young lads can work like men. Daft Sandy was laughing all the while.

'Rob, my man, what think ye o' the air-bubbles now? Maybe Daft Sandy is no sae daft. And do you think I would be going and telling any one but yourself,

Rob? Do you think I would be going and telling any one that was throwing the broken herring at me, and always a curse for me when I went near the skiffs, and not once a glass of whisky for an old man? Well, Rob, I will not ask you for a glass of whisky. If you say it is a teetotal boat, it is a teetotal boat; but you will not forget to give me whole herring for bait when you are going out of the bay?'

Rob could not speak; he was breathless. Nor was their work nearly done when they had got in the net with all its splendid gleaming treasure. There was not a breath of wind; they had to set to work to pull the heavy boat back to Erisaig. The gray of the dawn gave way to a glowing sunrise; when they at length reached the quay, dead-beat with fatigue and want of sleep, the people were all about.

They were dead-beat; but there were ten crans of herring in that boat. And you should have seen Rob's air when he counselled Neil and Duncan and Nicol to go away home and have a sleep, and when he loftily called on two or three of the boys on the quay to come in and strip the nets. But the three MacNicols were far too excited to go away. They wanted to see the great heap of fish ladled out in baskets on to the quay. Mr. Bailie came along not long after that, and shook hands with Rob, and congratulated him; for it turned out that while not another Erisaig boat had that night got more than from two to three crans, the *Mary of Argyle* had turned ten crans—as good herring as ever were got out of Loch Scrone.

Well, the MacNicol lads were now in a fair way of earning an independent and

honourable living, and this sketch of how they had struggled into that position from being mere wastrels—living about the shore like so many curlews—may fitly cease here. Sometimes they had good luck, and sometimes bad luck; but always they had the advantage of that additional means of discovering the whereabouts of the herring that had been imparted to them by Daft Sandy. And the last that the present writer heard of them was this, that they had bought outright the *Mary of Argyle* and her nets from the banker; and that they were building for themselves a small stone cottage on the slope of the hill above Erisaig; and that Daft Sandy had been taken away from the persecution of the harbour boys to become a sort of general major-domo—cook, gardener, and mender of nets. Moreover, each of the MacNicols

has his separate bank-account now; each has got a silver watch; and Rob was saying the other day that he thought that he and his brothers and his cousin ought to take a trip to London (as soon as the herring-fishing was over), for perhaps they might see the Queen there, and at any rate they could go and have a look at Smithfield, where the English beheaded Sir William Wallace.

THE PUPIL OF AURELIUS

THE PUPIL OF AURELIUS

CHAPTER I.

A BLOW FACED.

On a Sunday morning in the early part of November 1878 a stranger arrived at Euston Square, and passed from the gloom of the station into the brighter air of the London streets, there pausing for a second or two to look around him. He was a man of about fifty, short, thin, wiry, square-shouldered; his features firm even to sternness, and hardened by exposure to wind and weather; his hair gray; his beard also gray and clipped short. The

harshness of his face, however, was in a measure tempered by the look of his eyes; these were calm and contemplative, perhaps even with a shade of melancholy in them. For the rest, he was well and warmly clad in home-spun cloth; and he carried with him a small hand-bag, which appeared to be his only luggage.

He hesitated only for a moment. As he turned off to the left he met two labourers coming along.

'This is the way to London Bridge, is it not?' he asked, slowly, and with a strong northern accent.

'Yes, sir,' said one of them; and then, as he looked after the departing stranger, he took the pipe from his mouth and grinned, and said to his companion,

'Scottie means to walk it.'

The new-comer's next encounter was

less satisfactory. A drunken-faced woman jumped up from a door-step and begged for alms. He had not seen her. Instinctively his hand went to his pocket. Then he glanced at her.

'No!' he said, with unnecessary severity, and passed on.

But instantly the woman was transformed into a cursing and swearing virago. She followed him, making the little thoroughfare resound with her shrill abuse. Most people would, in such circumstances, have looked out for a policeman, or tried to get away somewhere, but this man turned round and stood still and regarded the woman. There was neither anger nor surprise nor scorn in his look, but a calm observation. He listened to her foul language, as if wishing to understand it; and he regarded the bloated face and

bleared eyes. The woman was not prepared for this examination. With another parting volley she slunk off. Then the new-comer continued on his way, saying only to himself:

'It is strange. I do not think that God could have meant any of His creatures to be like that.'

Now let us see what manner of man this was who was passing into the larger space and wan sunlight of Euston Road, making for London Bridge, with but little hurry, and always with his eyes regarding the withered trees, or the closed shops, or the early omnibuses with an observation that had no curiosity in it, rather as if these were mere passing phenomena that left no permanent impression on a mind too busily occupied with its own speculations.

His name was John Douglas. His father had been a small shipowner in Greenock, and, dying, had left this, his eldest son, a fortune of about £10,000. John Douglas, after patient judgment of the matter, arrived at the conclusion that it was far from just and fitting that he should have the exclusive use of this money, so he lent £7000, or thereabouts, to his two younger brothers, who forthwith took it, and, unhappily, themselves also, to the bottom of the sea, in a vessel which, recklessly, they had not insured. Thereupon John Douglas, having still over £3000, invested it in what was then considered a safe concern, and finding his wants very few and very simple, repaired to the Renfrewshire coast, and found there a small cottage overlooking the Firth of Clyde and the sea, where he could live

cheaply and comfortably. And he did live there very comfortably and contentedly, though not quite to the satisfaction of his neighbours, who resented the intrusion amongst them of a man who minded his own business, who would not listen to any tittle-tattle, who was absolutely indifferent as to what opinion, good or ill, they might have of him, and who took long and solitary walks among the hills on Sundays as on other days.

It ought to be said here at the outset that this man's character is not set up as in any way an exemplar. If mankind at large were so many John Douglases the world would not get on at all. We should have no iron bridges built, or Atlantic cables laid, or financial companies started, and we certainly should not have any man-killing machines a million or half-a-million

strong ; whereas every well-conducted person knows that such things are now-a-days absolutely necessary. The truth is, that John Douglas, or Captain Douglas, as the neighbours called him with a kind of grudging respect, was a skulker from the battle of humanity. What he wanted was a beach of white sand, a hot day, a blue sea, a book, a pipe, and the absence of his fellow-creatures. He was kind to such people as he was forced to meet ; and he was a favourite amongst the children in that part, for he bought them toys and sweetmeats when he went to Greenock ; but he preferred the society of his books to that of his neighbours, and he was impatient of idle talk. Indeed, what was the use of their conversing with a man who was far more interested in the first blossoming of the furze in spring than in a

Cabinet crisis, and who would go away and search for birds' nests in the woods, for the mere pleasure of looking at them, when the whole civilised world, from the Cloch Lighthouse all the way to Largs, was convulsed with the news that a minister in a parish adjacent had been heard to say something disrespectful about Calvin?

The three books, one or other of which John Douglas usually carried with him on his rambles by sea-shore or through some country lanes, were the New Testament, Marcus Aurelius, and Tannahill's Poems; but perhaps it was the wise Emperor with whom he most closely communed as the waves rippled along the sand, and the shifting lights crossed the clear blue of the Arran hills. He had so entered into the spirit of that proud and patient stoicism,

that he considered himself proof against anything that might happen to him in life or in death. It was a voice from far away, it is true—muffled, as if from the tomb; but it was human, sympathetic, kindly in the main.

'Every moment think steadily as a Roman and a man to do what thou hast in hand with perfect and simple dignity, and feeling of affection, and freedom, and justice; and to give thyself relief from all other thoughts. And thou wilt give thyself relief, if thou doest every act of thy life as if it were the last, laying aside all carelessness and passionate aversion from the commands of reason, and all hypocrisy, and self-love, and discontent with the portion which has been given to thee. Thou seest how few the things are, the which if a man lays hold of, he is able to

live a life which flows in quiet, and is like the existence of the gods; for the gods, on their part, will require nothing more from him who observes these things.'

And again:

'If thou workest at that which is before thee, following right reason seriously, vigorously, calmly, without allowing anything else to distract thee, but keeping thy divine part pure, as if thou shouldst be bound to give it back immediately; if thou holdest to this, expecting nothing, fearing nothing, but satisfied with thy present activity according to nature, and with heroic truth in every word and sound which thou utterest, thou wilt live happy. And there is no man who is able to prevent this.'

Or if one should not find any great work in the world to tackle?—

'Always bear this in mind, that very little indeed is necessary for living a happy life. And because thou hast despaired of becoming a dialectician, and skilled in the knowledge of nature, do not for this reason renounce the hope of being both free and modest and social and obedient to God.'

Or has one been injured?—

'The best way of avenging thyself is not to become like the wrongdoer.'

Why should one desire praise or fear blame?—

'Which of these things is beautiful because it is praised, or spoiled by being blamed? Is such a thing as an emerald made worse than it was if it is not praised? or gold, ivory, purple, a lyre, a little knife, a flower, a shrub?'

John Douglas knew nothing of the opinion in which he was held by his

neighbours; and, if he had known, he would not have heeded one jot.

Now it was in the waning of the year, when the great fuchsia-tree covering the front of Braeside Cottage had dropped all its dark-red bells, and when the rowan-trees along the road were yellowing, though masses of the scarlet berries still remained to delight the eye, that the news of the breaking of the City of Glasgow Bank came to these parts. There were those who knew that the residue of Captain Douglas's small fortune was invested in that flourishing concern, which had been paying dividends of 10 and 11 per cent; and they also suspected that he would know nothing of the terrible crash, for he seldom read newspapers. But not one of them would go and take the bad news to him. If he had not been a very sociable

man, it was not through pride. He had done many generous actions. The children were fond of him. They waited for himself to find out the misfortune that had overtaken him.

Douglas's first intimation was contained in a letter sent him by a solicitor in Greenock. The vague reference to what had happened he did not understand at first; but he called his old housekeeper and bade her to bring him the newspapers of the last few days; and then he sat down, quietly and composedly, and read the story of his ruin.

First came rumours about a certain bank. Then the definite statement that the City of Glasgow Bank had suspended payment. Then guesses at the deficit, beginning with £3,000,000, along with indignant comments about the manner in

which the business of the bank had been conducted, and commiseration for the shareholders, the large majority of whom, it was anticipated, would have to surrender every farthing of which they were possessed.

Douglas read on and read through ; and was neither shocked nor bewildered. He even remembered something about an official communication which he had opened a day or two before, and hastily dropped in order to fling a book at a strange cat that had come into the garden, and was cowering in wait for a chaffinch. He scarcely knew enough of business to understand who the creditors were ; but he could perceive that if they had even £2,000,000 owing to them, the first calls would far more than sweep away his little property and leave him a beggar. Very

well. He looked at the newspapers again; there was nothing in these crumpled sheets that could hurt him. A branch of a tree blown down by the wind on the top of his head could hurt him; or a chimney-pot falling from a roof; or a horse lifting its leg and kicking him; but a newspaper report he could thrust into the fire. He looked out of the window; the broad waters of the Firth were all ruffled into a dark blue by the morning breeze, and the sunlight shone along the yellow shores of Innellan; and far in the south Arran's jagged peaks were a clear blue among the silvery clouds: these things could not be altered by anything happening in Glasgow. He looked at his hands; there were ten fingers there that had not done much work in the world; surely it was time they should try? And surely they could win

for him bread and milk, or at the worst bread and water? In the meantime the thought of the cat had recalled to him that he had not as yet scattered crumbs for the birds that morning. That was the first thing to be done; and so he went and did it.

There can be no doubt that this contemptuous indifference was largely the result of the teachings of Marcus Aurelius, which this solitary man had drunk in until they seemed to have got absorbed into his very blood. But there was something more; there was a vein of personal pride of a very distinct kind. He would not admit to himself that any number of bank-directors in Glasgow or elsewhere had the power to harm him. Moreover, when, after waiting a considerable time to see how things would go, he went to Greenock to consult the solicitor who had written to him, and

to whom he was known, this stubborn pride and independence came out more strongly than ever.

'The question is,' said he, in his slow, emphatic way, 'do I owe the money, or do I not owe the money?'

'No doubt of it, Captain Douglas,' the other remonstrated; 'you are morally as well as legally bound. But the liquidators are human beings; they do not wish to press for the uttermost farthing; and well they know that this first call of £500 on every £100 of stock will ruin many and many a poor creature, and turn him or her out into the world. There is even a talk of a Relief Fund; I believe the Lord Provost of Glasgow and other gentlemen——'

John Douglas's face flushed quickly.

'I wish not to hear of such things,' he said, with a touch of resentment. Then

he added more slowly, 'I will take money from no man. I will earn my own living; if I cannot do that, what title have I to live at all? But I will take this obligation from you yourself, Mr. Campbell; if you will lend me five pounds, which I will repay to you. And I would like to take with me a few portraits, of my family and forbears, that can be of no use to any one; and one or two books likewise; then the rest can go to the liquidators, to roup or scatter to the winds as they see fit. I am a man of few words; I will repay you the money, if my health remains to me; and it will be enough to carry me to London and start me there.'

'To London!' said the tall fair man in spectacles.

'It is the great labour market of the world; it is natural I should go there.

Besides, there is another thing,' he added, with a trifle of embarrassment. 'Our family were well known in these parts in former years, and respected. I know not what I may have to turn my hand to. I will begin where I can be alone.'

He was a wilful man, and he had his way. He got the five pounds and the few pictures, and the three books named above; and when he entered the third-class carriage that was to bear him through the night to London, it was without fear. He had ten fingers, and he could live on a crust of bread and a drink of clear water. What was the hardship? Had not the great Emperor himself counted it among the blessings of his life—one of the things for which he was ever to be grateful—that he had been taught to work with his own hands?

CHAPTER II.

ALONE IN LONDON.

This, then, was the man who now found himself in the sickly daylight of the great city, walking along the wide thoroughfare on this Sunday morning. The grim and grizzled face was somewhat tired looking after the long and wakeful journey, and the dark eyes were fatigued and melancholy; but his step was light and firm. And it was well that it was so. He had been in other large towns before, but not in this one; and as he had determined to make for London Bridge, to get lodgings

near there,—seeing that that looked on the map to be about the centre of the commercial district,—he had traced out the safest route, by Pentonville Road and City Road down to the Bank. As he trudged and trudged, however, and no Bank made its appearance, he gradually woke himself out of that dreamy and contemplative mood. He began to make inquiries about distance and so forth. The driver of a four-wheeled cab, his purple bemuddled face lighting up with a dull sort of humour, gave him a facetious invitation to get inside the tumble-down old vehicle. The conductors of one or two passing omnibuses hailed him; and he gathered from their 'Benk! Benk!' that at least he was in the right direction. But he was not going to spend money causelessly; so he trudged on.

At length, when he got to the wide

square fronting the Royal Exchange, the solitariness of the place struck him with a strange chill. All the great buildings closed and deserted; not a habitable-looking house anywhere. But there were numbers of people passing along the thoroughfares — mostly groups of young men of about two-and-twenty, tallow-faced, round-shouldered, wearing over-coats and billycock hats, and smoking short pipes; and there were crowded omnibuses coming rolling along (what a difference was this roar and rabble from the quiet of the Sabbath morning far away there on the northern coast!) and these people must live somewhere. So again he contentedly trudged on; down King William Street; over the bridge spanning the misty river; along the Borough Road; until he arrived at Union Street. He had so far failed in

his quest for lodgings; but in Union Street he espied a coffee-house; and as he had become both tired and hungry, he entered the dingy little place, sat down, and ordered a cup of coffee and a roll and butter.

It was a kind of shelter, after all; though everything was dreadfully dirty, and there was a heavy odour in the place. The waiter brought him a greasy newspaper; but he put it aside. Then came his breakfast. The butter was not touchable; but he reflected that it was a luxury which he, living on another man's money, had had no right to order. When he had paid back the £5, he would consider the question of butter—though not butter such as this. He ate the dry roll, and managed to swallow the strangely-tasting coffee; then he fell asleep; and was eventually wakened by the ringing of church bells.

So, having paid his shot, he wandered out again into the pale and misty sunlight; and as he had been struck by the appearance of St. Saviour's in crossing the bridge, he strolled back thither, and entered the church, and sat down in a pew. He remained through the earlier part of the service; but when the sermon began, he left. The streets were now quite busy, though the shops were closed. It was not like Sunday on the shores of the Firth of Clyde.

'In any case,' he was thinking, 'it can be no great breaking of the Sabbath that a man should provide himself with a lodging to cover his head.'

Eventually, after much patient wandering and inquiring, he found a house in the Southwark-bridge Road—he was attracted to it by the presence of one or two flower-

boxes on the window-sills—where he was offered a small, fairly neat and clean bedroom for the sum of three-and-sixpence per week. Thereupon the bargain was closed; and John Douglas found himself established at least with headquarters, from whence he could issue to fight his battle with the great forces of London.

Well, day after day—nay, week after week—passed, and all his efforts to obtain employment had resulted in nothing. It was not through any shamefacedness or fastidiousness or false pride. He was ready to do anything. Many people thought this man a maniac, who calmly walked in and offered, in his slow, methodic Scotch speech, to copy letters for them, or do anything that could be pointed out to him, confessing, on interrogation, that he had been in no employment before, and

could therefore produce no testimonials as to character or fitness. On his own showing, there was nothing special he could do; though he had bought a little treatise on book-keeping, and occasionally studied it in the evenings. As he walked about the streets and observed how all the people around him seemed to be fully occupied, and busy and contented, it occurred to him as strange that they should all have fallen into these grooves so naturally. He looked at the clerk giving out tickets at a railway station, and thought he could do that also. Perhaps the business of the young men who every morning were to be seen inside the big windows of the drapers' shops in the Borough Road, decorating the place with ribbons and gowns, demanded a special knowledge that he had not acquired; but it could not be difficult,

for example, to be a policeman? They seemed happy enough; good-natured; sometimes even with a word of chaff for the costermonger whom they ordered to move on, him and his barrow.

These not very anxious experiments, and quite idle speculations about the uses of various forms of labour, might have gone on indefinitely but for the very certain fact that Douglas's small stock of money was being slowly but surely exhausted. Slowly, it is true; for he had wholly given up tobacco; his dinner was a roll or a biscuit eaten in the street; and as his landlady charged him sixpence for each scuttleful of coals, he preferred to keep himself warm on these now bitterly cold evenings by tramping about outside and looking at the shops. That good woman, by the way, was sorely disappointed in

this new lodger, out of whom she could make no indirect profit; and she had a waspish tongue. John Douglas regarded her taunts—almost amounting to open insult—with a patient and mild curiosity. It was a little bit of psychological study, and more interesting than book-keeping by double entry. Meantime, things were becoming very serious; with all his penuriousness, he had arrived at his last half-sovereign.

CHAPTER III.

A FELLOW-SUFFERER.

One night, a few minutes after nine, Douglas was returning home along one of the badly-lit little thoroughfares in the Borough, when he saw the figure of a woman slowly subside on to the pavement in front of him. She did not fall; she trembled on to her knees as it were, and then lay prone—near a doorstep. Well, he had grown familiar with the sights of London streets; but even if the woman were drunk, as he imagined, he would lift her up, until some policeman came along.

He went forward. It was not a woman, but a young girl of about seventeen or so, who did not seem a drunken person.

'My lass, what is the matter with ye?' he said, kneeling down to get hold of her.

'Oh, I am so ill—I am so ill!' the girl moaned, apparently to herself.

He tried to raise her. She was quite white, and almost insensible. Then she seemed to come to; she struggled up a bit, and sought to support herself by the handle of the door.

'I shall be all right,' she gasped. 'I am quite well. Don't tell them. I am quite well—it was my knees that gave way——'

'Where do ye live, my lass?' said he, taking hold of her arm to support her; for he thought she was going to sink to the ground again.

'Number twelve.'

'In this street?'

She did not answer.

'Come, I will help ye home, then.'

'No, no!' she said, in the same gasping way; 'I will sit down here a few minutes. I shall be all right. I—I am quite well——'

'Ye are not going to sit down on a doorstep on a night like this,' he said, severely. 'Come, pull yourself together, my lass. If it is number twelve, you have only a few yards.'

He half-dragged and half-carried her along. He knocked loudly at the door. There came to it a tall, black-a-vised woman, who, the moment she saw the girl, cried out—

'Oh, Mary Ann, are you took bad again?'

'No—don't tell them,' the girl said, as she staggered into the narrow passage. 'They'll turn me off. They said so the last time. I shall be all right. But my head—is so bad.'

They got her into the dingy little parlour, and laid her down on the horse-hair covered couch. Her hand was clasped to her head, and her whole frame was shivering violently, as if with cold.

John Douglas, living that recluse life up there in the north, had never before had to deal directly with sickness, and he was terribly anxious and alarmed. What was he to do? His first wild notion, observing the violent shivering, was to order hot whisky-and-water; then he thought it would be better to send for a doctor. But the tall, dark woman did not seem inclined to go or send for any doctor. She stood regarding the girl quite apathetically.

'Poor Mary Ann!' she said, watching her, as if she were a dog in a fit. 'She wasn't took as bad as this before. She's been starving herself, she has, to keep her mother and her young sisters; and she can't stand all day in the shop as she used to. I've seen it a-coming on.'

'God bless me, woman,' said Douglas, angrily, 'we must do something instead of standing and looking at the poor lass. Cannot you tell me where the nearest doctor is? Has one been attending her?'

'Poor Mary Ann,' the woman said, composedly; 'she'll come out of it; but it's worse this time. A doctor? She couldn't afford to have a doctor, she couldn't. A doctor would be bringing physic; she can't pay for physic, she can't. She owes me three weeks' rent, and I ain't ast for it once, not once. Thirteen

hours a day standing behind a counter is too much for a slip of a girl like that. Poor Mary Ann! Is your head bad, my dear?'

Douglas made use of a phrase which is not to be found anywhere in the writings of Marcus Aurelius, and hurriedly left the house. He made for the nearest chemist's shop, and asked the youth there where he should find a doctor. The youth glanced towards the back room, and said Dr. Sweeney was at hand. Dr. Sweeney was summoned, and appeared: a hard-headed-looking youngish man, whom Douglas immediately bore away with him.

The young Irish doctor did not seem much concerned when he saw his patient. He seemed to be familiar with such cases. He said the girl must be put to bed at once. She was merely suffering from a

feverish attack, on a system weakened by exhaustion and fatigue. Then he began to question the landlady.

The usual story. Girl in a draper's shop; mother and sisters in the country; sends them most of her earnings; probably does not take enough food; long hours; constant standing; drinking tea to stave off hunger; and so forth. Douglas listened in silence.

'And when she recovers from this attack, slight or severe,' he said at length, 'what would restore that young lass to a proper state of health?—can ye say that, doctor?'

'I can say it easily,' said the young Irishman, with a sarcastic smile. 'I can prescribe the remedies; and there are plenty of such cases; unfortunately the patients are not in a position to follow

my prescriptions. I should prescribe good food, and fewer hours of work, and an occasional week in the country air. It is easy to talk of such things.'

'Ay, that is so,' said Douglas, absently.

He went home. He took from his pocket the biscuit, wrapped in a bit of newspaper, that he had meant for his supper; but he put it on the top of a little chest of drawers, thinking it would do for his breakfast in the morning, and he would save so much. Then he went to the little stock of money in his locked-up bag, and found there eight shillings and sixpence. He took seven shillings of it, and went out again into the cold night, and walked along to the house where the sick girl was.

'Mistress,' he said to the landlady, in his slow, staid way, 'I have brought ye a little money that ye may buy any small

things the lass may want; it is all I can spare the now; I will call in the morning and see how she is.'

'You needn't do that,' said the tall woman. 'Poor Mary Ann—she'll be at the shop.'

'She shall not be at the shop!' he said, with a frown. 'Are ye a mad woman? The girl is ill.'

'She'll have to be at the shop, or lose her place,' said the landlady, with composure. 'There's too many young girls after situations now-a-days, and they won't be bothered with weakly ones.'

CHAPTER IV.

A RESOLVE.

However, as it turned out, there was to be no shop for Mary Ann the next day or for many a day to come. When John Douglas called in the morning, he was informed that she was 'delirious-like.' She was imploring the doctor—who had been there an hour before—not to let her lose her situation. She was talking about her mother and sisters in an incoherent way; also about one Pete, who appeared to have gone away to Australia and never written since. Douglas looked at the girl,

lying there with her flushed face, closed eyes, and troubled breathing, unconscious of his presence, only twisting the bed-clothes about with her hot hands.

'Poor Mary Ann,' the landlady said contemplatively. 'If she dies, she'll 'ave to be buried by the work'us. And if she lives, she'll be worse off than ever; for they won't take a girl with cropped hair into a shop, and the fear of infection besides. She ain't got a friend in the world, she ain't; except her own people, and they're only a drain on the poor thing. Poor Mary Ann! she *have* had a bad time of it. Perhaps it would be kinder in Providence if He took her; for who's to pay for her keep if she gets through the fever? Not that I would ask to be paid for her lodging; I ain't one like that; there's her room, and welcome; that's

what I says to my husband when he come home last night; and neither him nor me's afraid of fever, nor would turn out a poor thing as have been took. But law! it would be months afore she'd get another place; and she ain't got nobody to look after her.'

'What have you done with the money I gave you last night?' he asked.

'There it lies, sir—on the mantel-shelf. It ain't for me to touch; it is for the doctor to give his orders about that money.'

'Just put this eighteenpence to it, mistress, and ask the doctor what the poor lass may want. It is all I happen to have with me the now.'

Then he left; and walked away with an unusual air of determination. He was not downcast because he had parted with his last sixpence.

'It is even better thus,' this stern-faced man was saying to himself, 'for now we must face facts, and get rid of speculation. Let us begin at the beginning—with one's ten fingers! Poor lass! It is a dreadful place, a great city like this; it has no compassion. Surely, in the country, she would not be so utterly thrown down in the race. Surely, some one would say, "*At meal-time come thou hither and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar;*" and would command the young men and say to them, "*Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not. And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.*" Poor lass! poor lass! Even that cadaverous-jawed, Tennants'-stalk of a woman thinks it would be better for her to die.'

He walked quickly, his lips firm. It was a miserable morning; the noisy thoroughfares full of mist and wet and mud; drifts of sleet swooping round corners; the air raw and cold. The river was scarcely visible when he crossed London Bridge; the steamers and ships were like ghosts in the fog. He made his way as quickly as he could through the crowded streets, until he reached Tower Hill; then he passed up into the Minories; there he paused in front of one or two shops, in the windows of which were the most miscellaneous objects—old clothes, waterproof leggings, tin cans, and what not. At last he entered one of these places, and after a great deal of haggling and argument, he exchanged his coat of grey home-spun for a much shabbier looking dingy blue over-coat, that appeared

the kind of thing a pilot would wear. To this was added a woollen comforter; there was no money in the transaction. Douglas wrapped the comforter round his neck there and then, and put on the coat; when he stepped out again into the mud and snow and murky atmosphere, his appearance was much more reconcilable with the neighbourhood.

Still walking quickly, he went down to the London and St. Katherine Docks, passing under the shadow of the gaunt walls; and then along that dismal thoroughfare, Nightingale Lane, that looks like a passage between two great prisons; until at last, with moderate pace, and with a certain anxious, nervous look, as if he did not wish himself to be seen, he arrived at the entrance to a space at the corner of the London Dock, which was enclosed

with some rusted iron railings, and partially roofed over.

In this shed, shivering in the cold, and occasionally moving so as to avoid the whirling of the sleet, stood a number of most miserable looking wretches, men and lads. John Douglas knew very well who these were, and what they were there for. Here, so far as he had learned, was the only place in London where a starving creature could get work, without a character or qualification of any kind. Hither came those who, through drink, or idleness, or sheer misfortune, had got right down to the foot of the social ladder; waiting patiently in the dim hope that some extra pressure of work inside would occur to give them an hour or two's employment. Well, he did not hesitate long. He seized a moment when the attention of these poor

devils had been attracted by some sound to the other side of the grating (where the foreman was expected to appear), and glided in among the group, hoping to be unperceived.

But what sharp eyes hunger makes! They had no sooner turned hopelessly away again, than every man and lad of them caught sight of the stranger. They did not resent his intrusion. They regarded him with curiosity, and with apathy. He looked well-to-do for that kind of work. Perhaps if he were one of the lucky ones, he would stand a pot of beer on coming out in the afternoon.

But to their great astonishment, they were all to be lucky ones that morning. The foreman appeared, ran his eye over the group, and engaged the whole of them for the day,—all, except one dazed,

drunken-looking tatterdemalion of sixty or so, whom he warned off by name. Almost before he knew where he was, John Douglas found himself at work in the docks, at fivepence an hour.

CHAPTER V.

TREASURE TROVE.

The work was very easy, it seemed to him. What it might be in the warehouses he knew not; but here his business was simply to haul a small and light truck, carrying two boxes of oranges, from the unloading steamer along the side of the basin to the barge which was receiving them. The work was light, and there were pauses; moreover, the snow had ceased, and the surroundings—the ships and barges and what not—were picturesque enough; the scent of the oranges

was pleasant. And his companions, these poor wrecks of humanity who had drifted into this curious, quiet little pool, were in the main good-humoured, though most of them seemed too depressed to speak much. Of course they instantly called him 'Scottie.' Scottie got through his short day's work with satisfaction; and when at four o'clock the great bell began to toll, and when his wages, two shillings and a penny, were paid him, and when he set out for the gate, he was much contented, and was considering that, if he did his work diligently and respectfully and in silence, it was not at all unlikely that the foreman would take him on as a regular hand, at four-and-twenty shillings a week.

He was thus thinking, and he had got almost to the gate, when something ahead of him occurred that made him shrink

back with a look of dismay in his face. He saw that each man as he passed through the portal held up his arms, while one of the gatekeepers passed his hands over his clothes. They were being searched. Douglas stood still; his whole spirit in angry revolt. He would rather give up his day's wage, the coat off his back, the cap from his head—anything than have to go through this shameful ordeal. He looked back: could he not get out by the wicket at which he entered, at the other end of the docks?

'Come on, Scottie; you ain't been priggin' oranges, eh?' said one of his mates, laughing at him.

Now it was quite clear that this searching of the outgoing labourers was in most cases merely formal; but when the gatekeepers saw this man hanging back, they

naturally concluded he had been stealing. They called to him to come along. He hesitated no longer. With a grim air he advanced and held up his arms in the usual way. He would betray no shame. Doubtless it was a necessary precaution. And as he had stolen nothing, they could not hurt him by merely suspecting him.

But this gatekeeper's inspection was minute; and when he came to some slight protuberance on the breast of the coat, which, indeed, Douglas himself had not noticed, he demanded to know what it was. Nay, he had the coat taken off. On examination, a part of the lining of the coat was found to have been cut open and carefully sewn together again.

'Took all that trouble?' said the gatekeeper, glancing at him.

'I did not know there was any pocket

there,' said Douglas, hurriedly; 'I got the coat only this morning.'

'Oh, indeed,' said the other, with a slight derisive laugh. 'I shouldn't wonder if we found some tobacco all the same.'

The lining was ripped open, in the presence of the little crowd of labourers, carmen, stevedores, and so forth, who, seeing something unusual going on, had collected. Douglas certainly looked very guilty. His face was burning red; and the natural sternness of his features made him look as if he were angry at being detected. But, on the other hand, the expression on the face of the big yellow-bearded gatekeeper changed very suddenly, when he took from inside the lining a little oblong parchment bag, flat and dirty, and opened it, and drew out a thin packet of what turned out to be Bank of

England notes. Not many, it is true; but a marvel all the same. The gatekeeper glanced at the culprit again, and said good-humouredly,

'Bought that coat this morning? Then you're in luck's way, my man, that's all I can say. We don't keep them kind o' goods in our warehouses. There ye are.'

He once more examined the dirty little parchment bag all over; there was no scrap of writing on it, or on any of the notes.

'There ye are,' he said, giving him back both the coat and the valuable package. 'There's some as would advertise in the papers about that money; and there's some as would go to Scotland Yard, and expect to get something; and there's some, seein' as there's no writin', as would stick to it, and set up a shop. Where did you buy the coat, my man?'

'At an outfitter's in the Minories—it was an exchange for my own,' said Douglas hastily; he was anxious above all things, money or no money, to get away from this crowd of curious faces.

'An outfitter! yes, it's a fine name. Anyhow, the money don't belong to *him*. Most likely, now, that coat belonged to some seafaring man as got drownded, and the poor chap's things sold. Pass on there, my lads!'

Douglas escaped from the crowd, and got away. He was greatly bewildered and excited; not often in his life had he come through so much in so short a time. He walked hard, and did not stop until he sat down in his own little room, in the cold and dark.

Hour after hour he sat there, himself fighting with himself; or rather his con-

sciousness of what was right fighting with his great desire to do something to help that luckless child, lying there a few streets further off, friendless, poverty-stricken, fever-stricken, with the most hopeless of futures before her. He argued with himself that no doubt the gatekeeper's guess was correct; the money had belonged to some sailor or pilot, who had been drowned, and his personal effects, whether found on his dead body, or perhaps in the hold of a derelict, sold. Certainly these notes did not belong to the old-clothes' man in the Minories. It almost seemed as if a special act of Providence had placed this money at his disposal to succour this helpless one in her sickness, and support and strengthen her in her convalescence. As for himself, he never dreamed of touching it for his own

uses. He had found out at last one way of earning his own living. But even if he were to be permanently employed, at twenty-four shillings a week, how could he save enough out of that to give this girl generous nourishment, and a little wine, and country air, when she should get well enough again? In the meantime, were her mother and sisters to starve? And it never occurred to him to ask why he should take this sudden interest in this stranger girl or in her family. The fact was, he had never before been confronted with so clear a case of hardship and distress. The solitariness, the helplessness of the child appealed to him: it was as if he had seen a wren threatened by a hawk, or a rabbit seized by a weasel. He could not help interfering, and doing his utmost.

And how could this money of a dead and unknown man be put to a better use? Was he to go and bury it in Scotland Yard? Was he to advertise for a crowd of impostors to claim it? He lit the gas and examined the notes. There were seven—£35—a fortune! He saw the girl in a little cottage, the window open to let the first of the spring air into the room, she lying well wrapped up on a couch, a few wild-flowers on the table, daffodils and primroses from the woods, pink-tipped daisies from the banks, the red dead-nettle from the hedge-rows, and perhaps herself, to please him, and out of gratitude as it were, reading some of Tannahill's songs, 'Loudon's bonnie woods and braes,' 'Langsyne, beside the woodland burn,' 'Keen blows the wind o'er the Braes o' Gleniffer,' 'We'll meet

beside the dusky glen on yon burn side.' Poor child! she had probably seen but little of the country during her hard life. Would she be surprised when all the hawthorn came out, and the lanes were scented? Perhaps he would be able to teach her a little of the beauty of simple things, and remove from her mind the poor ideas about what is great and admirable and desirable begotten in a large city. 'Consider the lilies, how they grow; they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you that Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.' No doubt her notion of what was most beautiful and desirable in the world was to be dressed in satin, and driving in a coach, with powdered footmen behind, to a Royal Drawing-room.

All this was so specious and plausible.

The money lying there seemed to belong to him more than to any other. And what good might be done with it! Even if the real owner were alive, surely he would assent. Thirty-five pounds: ten pounds to be put into a savings' bank in her name; the rest to clear off the doctor's bill, give a weekly allowance to her people, and enable her to get a couple of months, or even more, with strict economy, in the country, before returning to the hard, dull work of London.

'I did not know,' he said aloud, in his slow, deliberate Scotch way, 'that money could have such value.'

By-and-by he rose, put the notes into the bag again, and that in his pocket; then he turned off the gas and went out, thinking he would walk round and see how the girl was getting on. That is to

say, he tried to make himself believe that that was all there was in his mind; but he knew very well that there was something else. There was a haunting, uneasy consciousness. Suddenly, at the corner of the street, instead of turning eastward as he should have done, he abruptly turned in the other direction, and began to walk quickly. 'The money is not mine; I will have none of it,' was his ultimate and fixed decision. 'No dreams, man; no temptation. The first step to perdition is no doubt smooth enough. If I can do the lass a good turn, it must be with my own money.'

He walked to Scotland Yard, finding it without difficulty, for he knew all the familiar features of London on the map; and there he told his story, and delivered up the money, and left his address. He

departed with a light heart. Nay, when he had crossed Westminster Bridge again, he looked out for a poor-looking coffee-house, and went in and had some coffee and a roll, and thought he never had enjoyed any dinner more. He looked at the evening paper, too, and then went out again into the wet streets, and continued his way. He was further cheered by hearing that the sick girl, though still feverish and perfectly weak and prostrate, had not, in the doctor's opinion, caught any serious malady, and only wanted time and care, and afterwards some better nourishment, to bring her round.

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF THE EPISODE.

So with courage and patience, and with a final gulp about that searching business, he returned to his work at the docks, and very soon got engaged as a permanent hand. He was a favourite with the foremen, for he was industrious and minded his own business; but he was greatly disliked by his companions. They would not believe, and he was at no pains to convince them, that he had not kept the found money; and they had expected him, if ever he returned to the docks, to

stand treat liberally. They were angry at Scottie's stinginess, and took to taunting him. These casual jeers he heeded no more than the idle wind; they could not hurt.

His savings slowly increased, his only serious expenditure being his weekly rent. When, each morning at twelve o'clock, the great bell rang in the docks, and the men and women came in with their baskets and barrows, his dinner consisted of a couple of penny sausage-rolls ('bags of mystery,' his mates called them), and these were really quite fresh and clean and wholesome-looking. In the afternoon or evening, he generally went round to the house where the girl, Mary Ann Ellis, was now so far recovered that she could sit propped up in bed for an hour or so; and he would have a chat with her and her landlady, and a cup of tea, with bread

and butter—for which he privately paid. He found this girl interesting, simple, and intensely grateful, but ignorant to a degree that he had not thought possible in a human being capable of reading. In one respect this was lucky, for she believed any nonsense he told her ; and the quite imaginary associations of ladies and gentlemen for the dispensing of needful charity received her most earnest thanks for those little sums that were sent to her mother, or that enabled her to pay off her doctor's weekly bill.

One day John Douglas was leaving the docks as usual, when he was overtaken by a tall and handsome young fellow, whom he knew to be connected with the Customs department.

'I say, aren't you the man that found a lot of money?'

Douglas had grown sulky, or rather suspicious of foolery, and was inclined to keep his own counsel. But the accent of this stranger went straight to his heart; he had not heard the Scotch way of speaking for many a day. So he turned and regarded the young man, and frankly told him what he had done with the money. This led to further questions, for the younger man's curiosity was aroused. It was the City of Glasgow Bank, then? But why take to such work as this? Couldn't he get into some office? Did he know a little of book-keeping?

The upshot of all this was that, about a week after, John Douglas found himself installed as clerk at a tall desk in the back-room of a co-operative store connected with the docks, at a salary of two pounds a week; and the first and imme-

diate result of this was that the mysterious charitable associations of which he was apparently the agent, commissioned him to inform Mary Ann Ellis that she need not try to get any situation for at least two months' time, because fourteen shillings a week would be paid to her during that period, to enable her to get thoroughly well again.

John Douglas grew to be a proud man. He was proud of having paid off that five pounds, and standing free of all the world; he was proud of his gradually-increasing account at the Government Savings Bank as a guarantee against future ill; but he was proudest of all of his patient, whose convalescence he in a measure attributed to himself. The days were longer now, and the weather fine; on the clear evenings, or Saturday after-

noons, these two would get into an omnibus, and go away out to Camberwell Green, or Kennington Park, or Clapham Common, and sit on a bench, and watch the young folks enjoying their sports and diversions. He was better dressed now, and she had got into the way of calling him 'Sir.' He told her a great deal about Scotland, and the mountains, and the glens with the birch-trees and waterfalls; but he always got into a difficulty when he came to the sea, which she had never seen. She could not understand that.

'Now, lassie, look at that piece of water there,' he would say to her, at the pond on Clapham Common. 'Cannot you imagine its going out and out until it gets far beyond the trees and houses yonder, until it gets beyond everything, and meets the sky?'

'I see what you mean, sir,' she would say; 'but I can't understand it: for I can't help thinking, if there was nothing on the other side to hold it up, it must tumble down. How can water hold itself up in the air?'

'Dear, dear me, lass!' he would say impatiently, 'have I not explained to ye how everything in the world, land and hills and everything, is held together?'

'Yes, sir; but water shifts so,' she would say; and he would take to something else.

The two months went by, and she got stronger and stronger, though sometimes she grew a little anxious about her chances of getting another situation. During this constant companionship, he had become much attached—in a compassionate sort of fashion—to this child whom chance had thrown in his way. He could see her

good points, and her weak ones. She was of a kindly disposition; truthful, he thought; with no very distinct religion, but she had a general desire to be good; simple and frugal in her ways of living,—though this was a necessity, and she had no idea of frugality being in itself a virtue. On the other hand, her views as to what was most to be desired in life were simply the result of the atmosphere in which she had lived; and she confessed to him that the most beautiful thing she had ever seen was the arrivals at a Mansion House ball—the coloured stair-cloth, the beautiful ladies, the brilliant uniforms. Her knowledge of politics was entirely derived from the cartoons of the comic journals in the shop windows; and she had any quantity of vague and vulgar prejudices about Catholics, Radicals, and Jews. But this patient listener, who seemed inter-

ested in her foolish little opinions, was a largely tolerant man. Such things were; let us make the best of them,—that was what he seemed to say. And as all the phenomena of the universe appeared to him to be worthy of respectful attention—even if one did not go the length of vexing one's self about any one of them—he was willing to learn that, in the opinion of this profound observer, the Catholic priests were bad men, who would let you do anything that was wrong if only you paid them enough money for absolution.

One evening, when he went round as usual, he found Mary Ann in great excitement; she had evidently been crying, and now she was laughing in a half-crying way.

'What is the matter, lassie?' said he severely, for he did not like 'scenes.'

'Oh, sir, Pete has written—at last—at

last!' she said, crying all the more, but in a glad sort of way, and looking again at the letter she held in her two hands.

'But who is Pete?'

'My sweetheart, sir; I never said anything about him—I thought he had forgotten us—but now he says he wouldn't write until he had good news, and now there is good news enough,—oh yes, there is! there is! For he has got a good place, and good prospects—and here is money to take me out, and my mother and sisters, too—all except fifteen pounds, Pete says, and that he'll send in three months' time. Oh, sir! you don't know what a good fellow Pete is!'

John Douglas sat down. His heart felt a little heavy; he scarcely knew why. But he began to ask a few questions, in a slow matter-of-fact way; and he did not remain long. He saw that the girl wanted

to read and re-read the good news to herself, and draw pictures of all that was coming.

The next afternoon Mary Ann got a note from him, with an enclosure. Thus it ran :—

'DEAR CHILD,—You need not wait through three months of uncertainty. I enclose for you what will make up the passage-money, and also pay the expenses of your mother and sisters' coming to London. Accept this quietly and sensibly, and do not make any fuss about it, nor when I see you. I shall be busy this evening, and may not call.

'Your friend,

'JOHN DOUGLAS.'

But all the same Mary Ann came round quickly, and with her the tall, gaunt, dark, composed landlady; and there was a great scene, Mary Ann crying and accusing herself of unheard-of stupidity for not having

guessed that he all along had been her benefactor; and he, on the other hand, sternly bidding her hold her peace and not talk foolishness.

'Ye did me a great service, ye foolish lass,' he said; 'ye made me take to actual work when I was merely idling and loitering about. Ye gave me an object to work for, and pleasant companionship for a space, and now, if I must find something else, that is as it has been ordered; and I maun bide my time.'

A few days afterwards he saw the mother when she arrived—a poor, limp sort of creature—and the two bewildered little girls. He could not, because of office work, go with them, as he had wished, to Southampton; but he accompanied them to the railway station, early in the morning, and bade them farewell. And as he turned away, he said to himself,

'These poor creatures I shall doubtless see no more in this world; but they will have a little regard for me, perhaps, while they live, and that is something. And now I will consider myself free to spend a trifle of money on myself, when I get it saved again; and I will use it during the holidays they speak of to take a trip back home again, and see the old place, and that the graves of my people are taken care of. And I may be able to make dispositions, too, so that when I am taken I may be placed there also; for it is but natural that one should wish to rest among one's own.'

THE END.

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